

**Factors that Most Influence Success or Failure
in Illicit Crop Reduction and Drug Supply Control**

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Submitted to the graduate degree program in Global and International Studies
and the Graduate Faculty of the University of Kansas in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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Date defended: December 10, 2014

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Abstract

Several interrelated drivers of illicit crop cultivation appear remarkably consistent across virtually all illegal crop producing regions: insurgency or armed conflict, insufficient state authority and weak territorial control, a climate of instability, poverty and food insecurity, remoteness and a lack of infrastructure and development. This research paper argues that the enduring success of illicit crop reduction and drug supply control efforts in a given area depends on the extent to which these environmental factors are mitigated or eliminated. The work further proposes that properly designed, carefully coordinated, and consistently funded alternative development (AD) programs have demonstrated the greatest promise for dramatically altering the primary drivers underlying illegal drug crop cultivation. By contrast, it contends that forced crop eradication without the prior establishment of effective AD can and has often resulted in dramatic short-term reductions in drug crop yields while exacerbating the fundamental causes of illicit cultivation. The research employs two case-oriented methods of qualitative analysis. First, a within-case method of process tracing is used, followed by a method of comparative analysis between the three case studies: Thailand and Laos in Southeast Asia, and Colombia in South America.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1. Introduction	1
Illicit Crops, Drug Production, and Drug Supply Control Efforts: A Preliminary Overview of Variable Dynamics and Drug Control Policy	10
Regarding Hypotheses	34
Regarding Research Methods	35
 Chapter 2. Opium Cultivation and Heroin Production in Southeast Asia: The Golden Triangle	 38
Thailand: Can It Be Done Elsewhere?	43
Thailand and the Triangle	44
Slow and Steady Change in the Thai Highlands	52
Laos: Caught in the Middle	63
The Laotian Labyrinth: The Nexus of Opium and Conflict in Late Twentieth Century Southeast Asia	73
Under the Pathet Lao	86
 Chapter 3. Coca Cultivation and Cocaine Production in the Andean Region	 95
Colombia: Volatility and Violence	103
Plan Colombia	112
 Chapter 4. Conclusion	 120
 Bibliography.....	 133

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Chapter 1. Introduction

Human use of intoxicants and mind-altering substances dates back to the prehistoric era, as far back as the Stone Age. Excavated artifacts of drug paraphernalia and DNA hair samples have confirmed this fact.¹ Man's non-medicinal use of various plant-based psychoactive drugs was also recorded very early in the historical period, and such drug use has probably existed in most cultures from antiquity to the modern age. In addition to recreational usage, throughout the centuries drugs have been formally employed as an adjunct to cultural rites and religious rituals in many cultures.

Regardless of the circumstances however, drugs have historically been governed by strict protocols and laws in most societies.² Therefore, throughout most of human history, a wide variety of drugs have not been readily available to the masses for recreational use. But as industrial capitalism evolved in the latter half of the nineteenth century and technological advances were achieved, mass production and increased global commerce enabled enormous stockpiles of drugs to be disseminated to demanding populations around the world.

In the twentieth century, producers developed an endless array of consumer goods and effectively exploited new sophisticated advertising and marketing techniques to create

¹ Jonathan Wynne-Jones, "Stone Age man took drugs, say scientists," *The Telegraph*, Oct. 19, 2008. Accessed 4-22-14, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstopics/howaboutthat/3225729/Stone-Age-man-took-drugs-say-scientists.html>.

² "The Role of Drugs in Prehistory," *Ancient Wisdom*. Accessed 4-22-14, <http://www.ancient-wisdom.co.uk/prehistoricdrugs.htm>.

widespread demand for their products. Modern commodity consumerism steadily engulfed the globe. These unprecedented events presaged the advent of popular recreational drug use as a worldwide phenomenon, as more and more goods became commoditized and available for purchase.³

Opium is a drug that has been used in various cultures for millennia, from the ancient Babylonian civilization of Sumer, to the Assyrians and the Egyptians, the Greeks and the Romans. In recent centuries, opium use has periodically flourished in niche cultures throughout much of the Middle East and Southeast Asia, often creating sizable populations of addicts.⁴ As a result of Britain's notorious Opium Wars of 1839 and 1856, the Chinese government was coerced into allowing regular massive shipments of foreign opium to flood the country, steadily inundating the population.⁵ As a result of this malign trade, and the enormous quantities of opium the state was eventually obliged to produce in order to supply runaway demand, their society was burdened with about 13.5 million suffering addicts by 1906. This number was approximately equivalent to a devastating 27 percent of their adult male population.⁶

³ Toby Seddon, *A History of Drugs*, (New York, New York: Routledge, 2010), 130-132.

⁴ Pierre-Arnaud Chouvy, *Opium: Uncovering the Politics of Poppy* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2010), 1-7.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 104.

⁶ Alfred W. McCoy, "Coercion and its Unintended Consequences: A Study of Trafficking in Southeast and South West Asia," *Crime, Law, and Social Change*, No.33 (2000), 198. Note: McCoy observes that in 1906, China imported about 4,000 tons of opium, and domestically produced 35,000 tons. In this peak year, their harvest was tantamount to Japan's 31,000 ton tea trade, or Brazil's 39,000 ton cocoa production.

Repeatedly, around the world, problems of addiction increased with successive syntheses of opium into powerfully concentrated opiate derivatives. Often, these new products rapidly proliferated around the world causing severe societal damage before possible ramifications could even be conceived of, let alone prepared for or prevented. For example, addiction to opiates soared in the United States during and after the carnage of the Civil War, when they were prescribed routinely for the alleviation of pain, resulting in thousands of addicts, north and south.⁷

Originally synthesized by Englishman C. R. Wright in 1874, Heinrich Dreser began production of diacetylmorphine, or heroin, for The Bayer Company labs in Germany in 1895 after discovering that its use did not produce some of the common side effects of morphine.⁸ Based on the qualified validity of those observations, a few years later the new drug was commercially marketed in the US with the tragically exaggerated claim that it was a “safe, non-addictive” alternative to morphine.” This promise immediately attracted scores of desperate morphine addicts and doctors alike.⁹

The US Congress assumed more active control over the manufacture and sale of opiates with the Pure Food and Drug Act in 1906, and the Harrison Narcotics Act in 1914.¹⁰ But the government had been regrettably slow to respond to years of steadily growing drug addiction in the country, and by 1925 there were an estimated 200,000

⁷ “History of Heroin,” *Narconon International*. Accessed 4-22-14, <http://www.narconon.org/drug-information/heroin-history.html>.

⁸ “Opium Throughout History,” *Frontline*. Accessed 4-22-14, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/heroin/etc/history.html>.

⁹ “History of Heroin,” *Narconon International*.

¹⁰ “Opium Throughout History,” *Frontline*.

narcotics addicts in the US.¹¹ By this time, many people had also acquired an addiction to opiates through the use of commercial “cure-alls” containing laudanum. These alleged medicinals were widely marketed for years and consumed by rich and poor, young and old.

Cocaine was synthesized from the leaves of the coca bush at about the same time as morphine was introduced to the US, in 1855.¹² Over the next several decades cocaine use, in the form of tonics and elixirs, became very popular at all levels of society in the US, especially after John Pemberton added cocaine to the recipe for his ubiquitous soft drink, Coca Cola. As with opiates, by the time congress added cocaine to the list of drugs regulated by the Dangerous Drug Act in 1925, there were legions of addicts suffering from cocaine addiction in the US.¹³

Of course, this is a historical account of only one country’s original relationship with these drugs. Other countries have had their own distinctive experiences regarding the use or production of opiates and cocaine, tempered by specific cultural and political influences. However, the US experience is uniquely important because of the status and power that the United States wields in international affairs and the dominant position the

¹¹ “History of Heroin,” *Narconon International*. .

¹² “History of Cocaine,” *Narconon International*. Accessed 4-22-14, <http://www.narconon.org/drug-information/cocaine-history.html>.

¹³ *Ibid.*

US government has assumed in the crafting and enforcement of a global prohibition regime.

So too, Americans' appetite for illicit drugs has been consistently robust, and therefore a prime focus of US law enforcement, politicians, and policymakers, who have pressed their agendas on the world stage. This has been especially true since the surge of recreational drug use in the 1960s.

An important part of Richard Nixon's "War on Drugs" in 1971 was the heavy political pressure exerted on the government of Turkey to crack down on their domestic opium production, officially alleged to be the primary source of the heroin flooding the US market at that time. In more recent years, since the era of skyrocketing cocaine use during the administration of Ronald Reagan, policy has been even more intensely focused on supply reduction and supply control, or "supply side" solutions to the problem of illegal drugs.

Since Reagan, many billions of dollars have been allocated to foreign governments to eradicate illicit crops and suppress drug production. Much of this aid has been sent in the form of military hardware, in a pronounced "militarization" of the "War on Drugs."¹⁴

Militarized crop eradications and patrolling operations in Latin America have characterized the "Drug War" in recent times. Such conduct has been effectively encouraged by a rigid "certification" process to verify compliance with US requirements concerning a nation's anti-drug efforts. This process has made many foreign governments eager to please in order to maintain good relations and sustain large sums of

¹⁴ "Thirty Years of America's Drug War, a Chronology," *Frontline*. Accessed 4-22-14, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/drugs/cron/>.

US aid money. This type of coerced compliance, and the predominant promotion of summarily suppressive military action and other prohibitionist tactics, orchestrated by the US and sanctioned by the UN, are at issue in much of the current discussion of the “War on Drugs” and international anti-drug policy.

Throughout history, there have always been ambitious entrepreneurs willing to break the law and risk trafficking in proscribed goods in exchange for handsome profits on the black market. There have also always been requisite supportive networks comprised of producers, middlemen, and retailers of illegal wares. However, since the revolutions in information and communications in the 1980s, along with contemporaneous evolutions in transportation and banking, criminal organizations involved in illegal trafficking have mushroomed almost beyond recognition in number, scale and sophistication.¹⁵

The ominous ascendancy of transnational crime, along with the spawning of new populations of addicts, has made illicit crop reduction and drug supply control an official priority around the world in recent decades. There have been some enduring successes, yet in so many cases, crop eradication and other drug suppression initiatives have failed to achieve their ultimate purpose.

The reasons for particular outcomes in endeavors of this type are immensely complicated, and a clear understanding of the pertinent dynamics requires very detailed examination and analysis. However, I believe that additional research and analysis across a large number of cases could serve to identify the common causal variables at play in alternately successful and failed drug control efforts. This is why I am proposing the

¹⁵ Moisés Naím, *Illicit: How Smugglers, Traffickers, and Copycats are Hijacking the Global Economy* (New York, NY: Anchor Books, 2005).

following question for research: *What factors most influence the success or failure of illicit crop reduction and related drug supply control efforts?*¹⁶

There are two main reasons why this important question needs to be addressed, and the sooner the better. Firstly, the sale of illicit drugs around the world annually nets hundreds of billions of dollars for violent transnational criminal organizations, many of which are also involved in other odious activities. Commonly trafficking in a diversity of goods ranging from small arms and stolen cars, to human laborers and sex slaves, most criminal networks continue to generate their prime revenue stream from drug trafficking, the staple of the global shadow economy. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) estimated that as much as \$1.6 trillion in criminal proceeds, largely

¹⁶ Regarding my research question and the definition and operationalization of terms: A nation's "success" in drug control efforts and the elimination of significant levels of illicit crop production is defined as a continuing period of five or more years of downward trends in illicit production, or positive assessments over the same period of time from the UNODC and the US State Department. (A corroborative substantiation of steady progress in crop reduction from the UNODC or US State Department may be pertinent due to the possibility of anomalous production spikes in overall downward trends of illicit crop production.)

The "illicit crops" focused upon in the research are restricted to coca and opium poppy, leaving aside cannabis and other more exotic illicit drug crops. I would speculate that there are both many parallels and many differences between cannabis and other major illicit crops in relation to production, processing, and trafficking. However, the scope of my research does not allow for an exploration of this assumption.

Finally, "drug supply control efforts," or various related references to "drug control initiatives," should be interpreted as broadly generic terminology that could entail many different kinds of activities, programs, and projects designed ultimately to reduce illicit crop cultivation and/or illegal drug supply. Such actions might come in the form of alternative development and programs to introduce legal alternative cash crops to rural farmers. Alternately, drug control measures might primarily focus on enhanced law enforcement. One particularly controversial drug supply control initiative is the forced eradication of illicit crops in the field.

derived from drug trafficking, was laundered through legal enterprises in 2009, which would have accounted for 2.7 percent of global GDP that year.¹⁷

Huge profits from drug trafficking operations endow powerful criminals with a greater wherewithal to finance a wide range of criminal activities. This money also serves to buy the influence and protection of corrupt policemen, politicians, and bankers. If we can determine the factors that have led to the sustained elimination of significant illicit crop production and successful drug supply control in some countries, it may be possible to focus on facilitating these conditions elsewhere in future efforts. In turn, if drug control efforts were generally more successful, we might be able to effectively restrict illicit revenue streams and curtail the growing resources and power of dangerous transnational criminal networks.

The second justification for pursuing this research is the fact that cocaine and heroin are dangerous drugs that kill scores of users and destroy countless lives every year. By 2011, cocaine use in the US had declined to nearly half its peak in 2006, but there are markets for the drug that are growing in parts of Europe, South America, and Africa. Similarly, heroin addiction is rapidly rising in many parts of the world, particularly in China.¹⁸ Heroin use in the US has climbed steadily in recent years as well, with users doubling between 2007-2012.¹⁹

¹⁷ UN Office on Drugs and Crime, "Illicit Money: How Much Is Out There?" October 25, 2011. Accessed 7-18-14, http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/frontpage/2011/October/illicit-money_-how-much-is-out-there.html.

¹⁸ David Eimer, "It's happy hour for the Heroin traffickers of the Golden Triangle," *South China Morning Post*, Sept. 26, 2013. Accessed 2-5-14, <http://www.scmp.com/news/asia/article/1317745/its-happy-hour-heroin-traffickers-golden-triangle>.

There is also a spike in drug use and addiction in drug crop-producer countries and all along drug trafficking routes, in addition to an associated preponderance of criminals and criminal activity in these afflicted zones. In the Golden Triangle, the opium addiction rate among males in some drug-producing villages was as high as 70-80 percent in the 1960s.²⁰ Analogously, the chronic use of cocaine and less expensive derivatives has besieged a growing number of societies across Central and South America in recent years. The smoking of “pasta base,” a cheap and highly toxic byproduct of cocaine processing, has percolated through the sprawling favela wastelands of cocaine production and trafficking zones in Latin America, spreading violence and addiction.²¹ If illicit crop cultivation could be more effectively and enduringly curtailed country to country, it

¹⁹ Kelly Riddell, “Hoffman’s death highlights U.S. spike in heroin use,” *The Washington Times*, 2-3-2014. Accessed 2-5-14, <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2014/feb/3/hoffmanns-death-highlights-growing-trend-us-heroin/>. The statistic is taken from a recent National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH), released 2013.

²⁰ Bertil Lintner, “The Golden Triangle Opium Trade: An Overview,” *Asia Pacific Media Services*, March 2000, 12. Accessed 2-18-14, http://www.asiapacificms.com/papers/pdf/gt_opium_trade.pdf.

²¹ Marcela Valente, “DRUGS-ARGENTINA: ‘Pasta Base’ Destructive but Not Invincible,” *Inter Press Service News Agency*, Sept. 12, 2006. Accessed 2-25-14, <http://www.ipsnews.net/2006/09/drugs-argentina-pasta-base-destructive-but-not-invincible/>. See also, Nathaniel Foote, “Paco: South America’s new drug of the poor,” *The International Relations and Security Network (ISN)*, June 23, 2008. Accessed 2-25-14, <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/Digital-Library/Articles/Detail/?lng=en&id=88498>. Note: “Paco,” short for “pasta basica de cocaine,” or simply “pasta base,” used to be thrown away as byproduct garbage after the coca leaves were processed and the cocaine was extracted. Paco is the chemical-laden, toxic mush that is left over after solvents like sulfuric acid, benzene, or kerosene have been mixed with the ground up leaves to yield the cocaine, as cocaine hydrochloride. After the cocaine is extracted, the remaining mash of leaves and solvents is a dangerously impure cocaine sulfate, or paco. Similar to the profile for crack cocaine, paco is purported to deliver a brief and intense high, and be

would reduce attendant levels of drug production and drug traffic in those areas, and have a significantly positive impact on public health and safety in many parts of the world.

In summary, many countries are currently suffering dramatic increases in the rates of drug addiction and related crime, misery, and societal degradation. HIV-infection is up in many places that are experiencing increases in heroin and IV drug use, while the wealth and malign influence of drug kingpins continue to grow. With an improved knowledge of the specific causes of success or failure in drug supply control efforts, we could hope to more regularly effect success, and thereby make more inroads against the global scourges of drug addiction, drug trafficking, and transnational criminal activity.

Illicit Crops, Drug Production, and Drug Supply Control Efforts: A Preliminary Overview of Variable Dynamics and Drug Control Policy

Identification of the factors that most influence success or failure in sustaining reductions of illicit crop cultivation requires a prior ascertainment of the main factors that underlie illicit crop production in the first place. A determination of these precursors may be achieved through careful comparison of currently active drug crop producers with former producers who have been able to sustain significant reductions in cultivation. Identification of key factors that are present in producer-countries currently classified as “Drug Majors,”²² but absent from those that no longer produce illicit crops on a large

highly addictive. Chronic users are said to rapidly deteriorate, physically and psychologically.

²² The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, “Presidential Determination – Major Drug Transit and Drug Producing Countries for FY 2014, Memorandum for the Secretary of State,” September 13, 2014. Accessed 1-23-14, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press->

scale, may provide a list of likely causal variables that must be remediated or mitigated in order to successfully reduce drug production in a given country or region.

Surveying the literature in the field, several interrelated environmental factors or conditions that appear to be prerequisite for drug production in a nation or region consistently emerge. This list includes ongoing war or armed conflict, insufficient state authority and weak territorial control, a climate of lawlessness, poverty and food insecurity, remoteness and lack of infrastructure and development, and a cultural history of drug crop production. Based on a method of process-tracing in individual case studies, an evaluation of how effectively a nation's anti-drug efforts dealt with these environmental conditions should clarify the effect that these variables have on the outcome of drug supply control initiatives in various cases. Finally, after a process of comparative analysis across cases, I expect to be able to draw some general conclusions about the causal variables that most influence success or failure in illicit crop reduction and drug supply control efforts.

The first three characteristics – conflict, poor state control, and lawlessness – are closely linked, and together make very fertile ground for drug production and criminal activity. In fact, the handful of countries given to large-scale illegal drug production and

[office/2013/09/13/presidential-determination-major-drug-transit-and-drug-producing-countri](#). Note: For FY 2014, the President identified the following countries as major drug transit and/or major illicit drug producing countries: Afghanistan, The Bahamas, Belize, Bolivia, Burma, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, India, Jamaica, Laos, Mexico, Nicaragua, Pakistan, Panama, Peru, and Venezuela. The majority of these countries are apparently listed for transit, not production. The document states that, “A country's presence on the foregoing list is not a reflection of its government's counternarcotics efforts or level of cooperation with the United States.”

organized crime that do not experience concurrent conditions of armed conflict and weak state control are mostly pariah states and outliers that have turned drugs and crime into big state-run business.

For example, along with the counterfeiting of currency, the government of North Korea itself is purported to be a major manufacturer and exporter of methamphetamines. Similarly, although not experiencing insurgent conflict, some nations formerly in the orbit of the Soviet Union have apparently experienced the criminal capture of significant sectors of state government and are now given to major transnational operations in drugs and crime. There are other examples of state-run drug production as well, but these are not the norm. It is more common that illicit crop cultivation and drug production occur mainly outside of state control.

Geographic areas that are not governed by a strong state authority capable of maintaining stability and enforcing the rule of law are vulnerable to domination by organized bands of insurgents, criminals, or terrorists that require unrestricted environments in order to operate. This accurately describes the majority of conflict zones around the world, where outlaw groups contest the weakened state's monopoly on violence and vie for control over territory and resources. Facilitated by the lack of governance and law enforcement in such regions, these groups often support themselves with profits from the production and trafficking of illicit goods, including illegal drugs.²³

²³ Vanda Felbab-Brown, "Shooting Up: The Drug Trade and Military Conflict," *Conference Papers -- American Political Science Association*, 2005 Annual Meeting, Washington, DC.

Over time, an unfortunate transformation can occur as increased revenue from illegal business operations enables rebels to purchase better weaponry and military equipment.²⁴ In turn, a rebel army with greater firepower is more formidable and has an increased capability to effectively carry out insurgent operations, including the defense and expansion of lucrative criminal enterprises like illicit crop cultivation and drug production. Armed conflict and the drug trade regularly evolve this kind of mutually reinforcing relationship, creating a vicious cycle that can be difficult to counter. Subsequent efforts to reduce illicit crop production are easily sidelined by besieged states primarily focused on counterinsurgency operations, and drug supply control measures that do get initiated in conflict zones are often defeated amidst the chaos of war.

These particular confluential dynamics surrounding drug production are dissected in the writings and lectures of Svante E. Cornell,²⁵ researcher at Johns Hopkins University, and Vanda Felbab-Brown,²⁶ Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institute. Both authors detail how rebel armies operating in areas of contested authority are commonly financed by drug production and drug trafficking, and their research is frequently cited in discourse concerning the destructive symbiotic relationship between the drug trade and civil conflict. Similarly, there is a historical background of armed conflict and destabilization in each of the following case studies of illicit crop production detailed here.

²⁴ Ibid., 11-12.

²⁵ Svante E. Cornell, "Narcotics and Armed Conflict: Interaction and Implications," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 30, No. 3 (April 2007): 207-227.

²⁶ Vanda Felbab-Brown, "Shooting Up: the Drug Trade and Military Conflict."

Economist and author Paul Collier has also written extensively on the many complexities of armed conflict and the “conflict trap.”²⁷ In *The Bottom Billion* and other writings, he has also detailed how production and traffic of contraband like drugs has repeatedly provided financial support for rebel forces. Substantiating a strong correlation, Collier confirms that “Ninety-five percent of global production of hard drugs, for example, is from conflict countries.”²⁸

Corroborating the research of Cornell and Felbab-Brown, Collier has found that many wars are perpetuated by soldiers who have developed a financial stake in sustaining a chaotic and lawless environment that is conducive to illicit activity. The vicious cycle involving conflict and the corrupting influence of the drug trade is such that possibly onetime legitimate political grievance regularly devolves into motivations of pure greed. This profile also accurately characterizes many pro-government militias operating in conflict zones, as the temptation to exploit money-making opportunities in the absence of authority draws all sides into the production and trafficking of illegal drugs.

The work of Pierre-Arnaud Chouvy concerning opium production, drug prohibition, and drug supply control policy is also widely cited in the field. In *Opium: Uncovering the Politics of the Poppy*, he traces the modern history of opium production in Southeast and Southwest Asia.²⁹ Here, Chouvy describes the way that weakened state authority and war have recurrently created opportune contexts for crime and drug production in this

²⁷ Paul Collier, *The Bottom Billion: Why the Poorest Countries Are Failing and What Can Be Done About It* (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 18-37.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 31.

²⁹ Chouvy, *Opium*.

part of the world. From the Shan State area of eastern Myanmar, to war-torn Afghanistan, Chouvy details how opium production has naturally gravitated to lawless regions rife with conflict. As we shall see, detailed in the case history profiles sections below, from the Golden Triangle in Southeast Asia to the Andean nations of Latin America, a terrible trifecta involving illicit crop cultivation, armed conflict, and weak state control of territory appears to be ever-present.

Other characteristics of drug-producing regions are also closely associated – geographic remoteness, a lack of development, and poverty all contribute to food scarcity and food insecurity. In remote, undeveloped areas that are wracked by violence and chaos, impoverished rural populations often find very few alternatives to growing coca or poppy in order to buy food and survive.

There is a wide consensus in the literature that food scarcity and food insecurity are major drivers of illicit crop cultivation around the world. Though the specific reasons for food insecurity may be complex and vary from region to region, in nearly all drug crop producing areas one finds chronically impoverished farmers that are desperately trying to feed their families. In these remote and undeveloped regions, the people often have difficulty growing enough staple foods to feed themselves and need to earn cash to buy supplementary food, generally rice or wheat. Without transportation infrastructure to get legal goods and produce to market, the only buyers that come to them are the

narcotraffickers, trekking through the jungles and over the mountains, anxious to buy coca leaves and opium.³⁰

For example, the rugged upstream Mekong valley, where heavy monsoon rains wash over mountainous countryside, represents the wild territory called the Golden Triangle. This is the rustic highland region of Southeast Asia, where the borders of Burma (Myanmar), Laos, and Thailand meet.

The inhabitants of the remote and undeveloped highlands of Southeast Asia are mostly tribal peoples. They traditionally practice slash-and-burn agriculture and often have difficulty producing rice yields sufficient to feed their families. A lack of irrigation and adequate manpower are common agricultural dilemmas in this region. This is described in some detail by Pierre-Arnaud Chouvy,³¹ and it is also documented in numerous reports from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the flagship international body associated with monitoring drug production, drug trafficking, and drug control policy implementation.

The role of food scarcity and food insecurity in driving opium production in the Golden Triangle in general, and in Thailand specifically, is also confirmed by author Ronald D. Renard in his influential study for the United Nations International Drug Control Programme (UNDCP), *Opium Reduction in Thailand 1970-2000: A Thirty-Year Journey*.³²

³⁰ Adam Isacson, "The Tragedy of Alternative Development in Colombia," *Colombia Journal*, Dec. 3, 2001. Accessed 2-1-14, <http://colombiajournal.org/the-tragedy-of-alternative-development-in-colombia.htm>.

³¹ Chouvy, *Opium*, 131-41.

³² Ronald D. Renard, *Opium Reduction in Thailand 1970-2000: A Thirty-Year Journey* (Bangkok, Thailand: UNDCP / Chiang Mai, Thailand: Silkworm Books, 2001), 28-32.

By comparison, Pierre-Arnaud Chouvy explains that in the mountainous nation of Afghanistan and much of the Golden Crescent, it is the large households and limited availability of arable land that has put the rural populations in similar circumstances involving food scarcity and food insecurity.³³ As a result, many Afghan farmers cultivate opium poppy in order to generate the money to buy sufficient stores of wheat for themselves and their large families. In efforts to avoid hunger and starvation, the poorest of Afghan farmers find few alternatives to growing opium poppy. Reinforcing this course of action, similar to other drug crop regions, many destitute farmers find that they can secure loans only to grow opium, not licit crops.³⁴

The research of author Lamond Tullis has further supported the basic assessment linking poverty and a lack of economic alternatives with the drug trade.³⁵ Noting that desperately impoverished urbanites also have sometimes migrated to rural growing regions to cultivate illicit crops, particularly coca, Tullis concurs that, “Poverty and the absence of alternative income pursuits therefore contribute to criminal involvement in the drug trade.”³⁶

Note: Now defunct as such, the UNDCP was combined with the Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Division in the United Nations to form the UNODC in 1997.

³³ Ibid., 133-41.

³⁴ Ibid., 139.

³⁵ Lamond Tullis, *Unintended Consequences: Illegal Drugs & Drug Policies in Nine Countries*, UN Research Institute for Social Development and UN University (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1995).

³⁶ Ibid., 19.

In various ways, a major drug crop producing region will almost always exhibit all of the aforementioned prerequisite characteristics simultaneously.³⁷ Interestingly, by comparison, many non-producer countries possess some or most of these conditions, yet they are not major producers of illicit crops. For example, countries that have rural populations that suffer from poverty, food scarcity, and a lack of development, but experience no armed insurgency and are well policed by an authoritative government with strong territorial control, are likely to escape the yoke of a thriving drug trade. On the other hand, unfortunately, they may also be forced to indefinitely endure government repression and grinding poverty with few alternatives.

The nation of Vietnam appears to fit into this category, with a government that has a history of exacting capital punishment for possession of even relatively very small amounts of illicit drugs.³⁸ At the same time, little consistent effort has gone to establishing alternative development (AD) and alternative livelihoods to sustain would-be poppy farmers.

³⁷ Note: There are a few unique cases that do not exhibit these characteristics, but they are anomalies and should be considered outliers to the norm. For example, the Netherlands is a well-developed nation that hosts a significant amount of illegal cannabis cultivation. However, it is obvious that this is a result of their quasi-legal cannabis economy, and the longstanding incongruity of their “legal frontdoor, illegal backdoor” drug policy.

³⁸ James Windle, “The Suppression of Illicit Opium Production in Viet Nam: An Introductory Narrative,” *Crime, Law and Social Change*, Vol. 57, Issue 4 (May, 2012): 425-439. See also, “Vietnam reduces opium poppy fields,” *The Vietnam News/Associated Press*, Feb. 21, 2001. Accessed 1-24-14, <http://patrick.guenin2.free.fr/cantho/vnnews/poppy.htm>.

Repressive governments notwithstanding, it is encouraging that a number of countries do not produce illicit crops in significant quantities despite exhibiting some or most of the deleterious characteristics listed above. It indicates that if one or more of these negative drivers is missing or radically altered, it may make a crucial difference. It may prevent or disrupt the destructive spiral that enables drug production, and create space for progressive movement.

In most regions that host significant levels of illicit crop cultivation, all of the aforementioned interrelated negative characteristics manifest simultaneously. It is this unfortunate confluence of conditions that predicates a vicious cycle, miring nations in illicit crop production and the drug trade. However, progress in the mitigation of just one contributing factor can begin to disrupt the destructive synergy and help to enable progress in other problem areas.

For example, an infrastructure project to build roads in a drug-producing region renders that area less remote, and more accessible to state authority and law enforcement, an essential step toward establishing stability and the rule of law. Roadways also greatly improve access for the military, which is often denied easy entry to undeveloped areas of the conflict-zone where rebel armies take refuge and illicit crops are cultivated. In drug-producing countries, it is common that these remote areas shelter anti-government insurgents financed by the drug trade.

In turn, increased governmental control of national territory might contribute to decisive military advances, and an environment more conducive to peace talks and negotiations. Peace and stability would bring the opportunity to conduct more extensive AD projects in a safe and stable environment. Finally, in such an environment, the new

roads would be essential for the timely and efficient transport of licit crops and products as viable alternatives to illegal coca and opium.

The positive scenario outlined above is actually what appears to be occurring in Colombia right now. It is also something that the Peruvian government envisions and is currently attempting to manifest in the Valley of the Apurimac and Ene Rivers (known as the VRAE). The VRAE is an area that was recently assessed by the UN as the world's biggest producer of coca, and the environment hosts all of the defined negative characteristics that commonly affect drug-producing regions.³⁹

After carefully considering both the generic and specific case descriptions above, one can begin to appreciate the complexity of the mutually-reinforcing conditions surrounding illicit crop production, and the way in which governments might hope to turn the tide and begin to effect positive change in troubled drug-producing areas. The positive model describes a chain of events that is like a mirror image of the negative spiral that manifests in afflicted drug-producing zones, because it is predicated on the same close symbiotic relationship of the fundamental characteristics inherent in the environment.

According to the model, by employing appropriate initiatives and tactics, the interrelated nature of these negative environmental factors is harnessed, altered, and turned around, as a drug-producing region is steadily rendered less remote and more stable. As ideally described above, such action would progressively facilitate drug

³⁹ Simeon Tegel, "As US ups aid to Peru's drug battle, farmers say they will fight to defend cocaine source," *GlobalPost/NBC News*, Oct. 12, 2013. Accessed 2-25-14, <http://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/us-ups-aid-perus-drug-battle-farmers-say-they-will-v20920291>.

supply control objectives, as vicious circles of circumstances surrounding drug production are transformed into new virtuous cycles capable of producing their own forward momentum for change.

But before AD programs or infrastructure projects like road building can be successfully conducted, there must exist a certain level of peace and stability in the environment. Admittedly, the overall level of conflict in the VRAE is lower than in the worst drug-producing provinces of Afghanistan, where various initiatives have been delayed or abandoned. In areas experiencing higher levels of conflict, aid workers risk being kidnapped⁴⁰ or killed, and projects risk being sabotaged and ruined.⁴¹

Therefore, it is often necessary to first work toward establishing an environment relatively free from active hostilities before development projects can proceed. There can be little hope of substantively remediating other enabling factors of drug production amidst endemic chaos and violence. Of course, ending armed civil conflict is not easy to do. But establishing a relatively peaceful, stable environment based on law and order

⁴⁰ USAID/Humanitarian Outcomes, “The New Normal: Coping with the Kidnapping Threat,” *Aid Worker Security Report 2013*. Accessed 11-1-14, https://aidworkersecurity.org/sites/default/files/AidWorkerSecurityReport_2013_web.pdf

⁴¹ Simeon Tegel, “Peru: Cocaine king’s riches don’t reach growers,” *GlobalPost*, Oct. 15, 2013. Accessed 2-25-14, <http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/news/regions/americas/peru/131014/cocaine-cocavrae-farmers-drug-war>. Note: In July, 2013, Peruvian rebels temporarily halted the government road building project in the VRAE through an arson attack on heavy machinery used to lay the tarmac. See also, Gary Yia Lee, “The Hmong of Laos: Overview of Their Transnational Adaptation,” *The First International Workshop on the Hmong/Miao in Asia*, September 11-13, 1998. Accessed 4-17-14, <http://members.ozemail.com.au/~yeulee/Topical/hmong%20of%20laos.html>. In this paper, Dr. Lee details how a UNDP opium replacement project that began in 1991 in the Vientiane region was completely halted a few years later when road construction reached Pha Lavae, where the project workers were met with armed resistance.

should be considered an essential prerequisite to achieving lasting success in illicit crop reduction and drug supply control.

As previously stated, identifying the standard environmental attributes that accompany illicit crop production is a logical preliminary to evaluating success and failure in reducing production and controlling illegal drug supply. After achieving an advanced understanding of the common drivers underlying illicit crop production, one is then able to assess whether or not particular initiatives or projects are aptly aimed to significantly alter those causal factors.

Unfortunately, current anti-drug policy has been widely criticized as failing to adequately address the root causes of illicit crop production, while placing too much emphasis on prohibition and forced eradication. Perhaps this is why reductions of illicit crop cultivation seem so difficult to achieve, and even harder to sustain. It may be that the policy tools that are most often used to reduce drug production are not optimal for the job, and only capable of achieving temporary and qualified success.

Certainly, a temporary reduction of acreage under illicit production can be achieved by a single vigorous campaign of forced eradication. And a government that implements this policy can be assured of authoritative international accolades and millions, if not billions, in aid and military equipment to continue the fight. But aside from the harm that accrues to poor farmers and local residents as they are suddenly deprived of their livelihoods and means to feed their families, many expert observers question that eradication has any lasting benefit at all. This is because eradication does nothing to mitigate the fundamental drivers of illicit crop production, and often actually exacerbates them in terms of increasing poverty and conflict in the region. Furthermore, eradication

can have a radicalizing effect on a rural population, further weakening state legitimacy and consolidating support for the activity of armed rebels and narcotraffickers.⁴²

In accordance with the 1961 UN Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs and subsequent complimentary conventions, there is official multilateral consensus regarding the strict control of opium and coca production. However, as suggested above, international issues surrounding illicit drug production and drug suppression policy have long been dominated in direction and tone by the United States with an emphasis on “supply-side solutions.”

Heavy-handed militarization and law enforcement aspects of the “War on Drugs” have always drawn criticism and controversy for the collateral destruction that occurs, but currently there is much debate about the essential effectiveness of conventional drug supply control tactics. Moreover, some have raised questions about the validity of the basic rationale governing the overall strategy of drug control policy.

The theoretical underpinnings of illicit crop eradication, as a part of contemporary international drug control strategy, derive from market economics and the basic law of supply and demand as it affects commodity prices. As officially stated, the main strategic goal of crop eradication has been to reduce the overall supply of an illegal drug in order to substantially drive up street prices, thereby deterring customers with prohibitively exorbitant costs for illegal drugs.

But the desired result has not manifested for any sustained duration, largely due to the elasticity of the illegal drug market, and other characteristics of supply and demand

⁴² Vanda Felbab-Brown, “Trouble Ahead: The Cocaleros of Peru,” *Current History*, 105.688 (Feb. 2006): 79-83.

creating what are called “displacement effects.” Like the air in a squeezed balloon will simply be displaced and bulge out in another area, restricted drug supply in one region displaces production to another by actively incentivizing potential producers in other areas through the rising value of illicit crops created by reduced global supply. This particular displacement phenomenon has been termed the “balloon effect.” Most observers accept that this dynamic regularly occurs, and therefore believe that past crop eradication and production suppression efforts have been largely unproductive.

But some observers have alleged that the results are even worse than merely unproductive. Authors such as Paul Gootenberg⁴³ and Bruce Bagley⁴⁴ claim that displacement effects have made contemporary drug suppression efforts counterproductive, resulting in cheaper drugs of higher purity and an increased global supply.

Similarly, historian Pierre-Arnaud Chouvy authoritatively criticizes the effectiveness of the current anti-drug strategy.⁴⁵ He points out that the notorious “Golden Triangle” region itself initially emerged as the result of a “balloon effect,” after the Chinese banned opium exports and slashed production in 1949, and the Iranians banned production in 1955.⁴⁶

⁴³ Paul Gootenberg, “Talking about the Flow: Drugs, Borders, and the Discourse of Drug Control,” *Cultural Critique*, No. 71, “Drugs in Motion: Mind-and-Body-Altering Substances in the World’s Cultural Economy,” (Winter, 2009): 20-21.

⁴⁴ Bruce Bagley, “The Evolution of Drug Trafficking and Organized Crime in Latin America,” *Sociologia, Problemas E Práticas*, No. 71 (2013): 99-123.

⁴⁵ Chouvy, *Opium*.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 17-18.

Often cited in the literature, historian and author Alfred W. McCoy concurs with the idea that many Western drug-control policies have exacerbated the problem and actually increased global drug supplies.⁴⁷ This is a sensible conclusion, since the kind of “drug-control” that Western powers exercised for more than a century was chiefly characterized by monopoly and profit, rather than prohibition. McCoy explains that through vigorous and aggressive imperial sponsorship of the opium trade, from the late eighteenth century through the early years of the twentieth century, opium production became embedded “into the tribal economies of highland Asia and its consumption into the urban cultures of Asia and the West.”⁴⁸

McCoy posits that more contemporary drug war maneuvers have been based on an underestimation of the deep economic roots and tenacious elasticity of the drug market as a longstanding integral facet of global commerce. After World War I, as voluntary national regulation of narcotics gave way to mandatory international controls, almost limitless opportunity for profit was simultaneously created in the form of a black market for illicit substances, with a vast established and demanding global customer base.

⁴⁷ Alfred W. McCoy, “Coercion and its Unintended Consequences: A Study of Heroin Trafficking in Southeast and South West Asia,” 191-224. Note: Many consider Alfred W. McCoy as the premier authority on the mid/late twentieth century opium and heroin trade in Southeast Asia, and his works are very widely cited. Aside from the above article, I will be drawing from two of his books:

Alfred W. McCoy, *The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1973).

Alfred W. McCoy, *The Politics of Heroin: CIA Complicity in the Global Drug Trade (Afghanistan, Southeast Asia, Central America, Colombia)* (Chicago, IL: Lawrence Hill Books / New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2003). Note: This is a revised and extensively supplemented edition of the title from Harper & Row, 1975.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 192.

Consequently, suppression of the resilient illegal drug industry in one place after another has simply pushed drug traffickers further and further afield, obliging them to cultivate myriad alternative suppliers and networks, in a displacement phenomenon that has been called the “cockroach effect.”⁴⁹ As a result, McCoy explains that the upshot of prohibition has been that narcotraffickers have now spread to every corner of the globe with increased sophistication and ability. He states:

Despite some initial success, America’s drug war had thus produced a paradoxical strengthening of the global narcotics traffic. By the late 1970s, the simplex of the Turkey-Marseilles-New York heroin pipeline had been replaced by a complex of international smuggling routes that tied the disparate zones of First World consumption to Third World narcotics production. With production and consumption now dispersed about the globe, the international traffic was far more resistant to suppression than ever before.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Bagley, “The Evolution of Drug Trafficking and Organized Crime in Latin America,” 113. Note: When a significant level of illicit crop cultivation is suppressed in one region, rising prices incentivize illegal cultivation by farmers in less restricted regions, and the overall global supply of the drug is eventually compensated. This transfer of illegal crop cultivation and production, back and forth between regions and nations, has been famously called the “balloon effect.” Similarly, the “cockroach effect” is an amusing term, used by some to describe how drug traffickers and persons involved in the illegal drug trade scatter to other places and other trafficking operations due to heavy law enforcement action in a particular territory or trafficking corridor. Finally then, authorities are forced to play a frustrating game of “whack-a-mole,” trying to suppress activity as it pops up in one place after another. (These terms are referenced by Bagley, as quoted by John Lyons, “Cocaine: The New Front Lines,” *Wall Street Journal*, January 14, 2012. Accessed 12-4-14, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052970204331304577145101343740004>.)

⁵⁰ McCoy, “Coercion and its Unintended Consequences: A Study of Heroin Trafficking in Southeast and South West Asia,” 206.

But some critics insist that the counterproductivity of the balloon effect and other displacement phenomena has been overstated. These observers believe that even with a measure of displacement, eradication and suppression are productive and important because they significantly disrupt criminal activity and criminal networks. Authors James Windle and Graham Farrell point out that this disruption necessarily incurs a loss in illegal profit, as well as substantial additional costs for the relocation and reestablishment of criminal operations.⁵¹ Drawing from the work of others in the field of criminology,⁵² Windle and Farrell also endorse principles of “deflection” and “containment.” These are ideas about shaping and routing the displacement flows of criminal activity in ways that may benefit law enforcement and the public welfare.

In the context of the academic debate over contemporary anti-drug policy, it should be noted that the ubiquitous official governmental and intergovernmental reports and assessments of drug production and drug suppression are generally tacit endorsements of the current orientation and strategy of the Drug War. As such, they provide a hefty counterweight to academic and popular detractors. Cumulatively, these publications and pronouncements perpetuate a powerful directional momentum of discourse, shaped and led by UN and US government agencies.

⁵¹ James Windle and Graham Farrell, “Popping the Balloon Effect: Assessing Drug Law Enforcement in Terms of Displacement, Diffusion, and the Containment Hypothesis,” *Substance Use & Misuse*, Vol. 47, No. 8-9 (June-July 2012): 868-876.

⁵² Robert Barr and Ken Pease, “Crime Placement, Displacement, and Deflection,” *Crime and Justice*, Vol. 12, (1990): 277-318.

As a definitive official overview and critique of the background and current status of US and international drug control policy, I refer to Liana Sun Wyler's recent congressional report.⁵³ In my research, I also refer to the work done by Ms. Wyler and others in another recent report to congress on US counterdrug programs in Latin America.⁵⁴

Considering the common occurrence of displacement effects and other significant traumas, it is difficult to declare any drug suppression effort an "unqualified success." But for the many people who live in a drug-producing region that is negatively impacted by the escalated levels of crime, violence, and addiction that accompany the drug trade and drug production, the elimination of widespread illicit crop cultivation for an extended duration can potentially translate as very meaningful progress and a successful achievement.⁵⁵

⁵³ Congressional Research Service, "International Drug Control Policy: Background and U.S. Responses, CRS Report for Congress," by Liana Sun Wyler, (August 13, 2013). Accessed 11-9-14, <http://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL34543.pdf>.

⁵⁴ Congressional Research Service, "Latin America and the Caribbean: Illicit Drug Trafficking and U.S. Counterdrug Programs, CRS Report for Congress," by Clare Ribando Silke, Coordinator, Liana Sun Wyler, June S. Beittel, and Mark P. Sullivan, (May 12, 2011). Accessed 11-9-14, <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R41215.pdf>.

⁵⁵ Note: In the course of case-analysis I will further explore the ramifications of displacement effects and other possible harms that accrue from drug suppression activities. Ramifications will be analyzed as potentially influential elements in a historical process, elements that may or may not affect durable and definitive success in limiting illicit crop production. An operationalizing definition of "success" and other terms contained in the research question are included below in the sections discussing research methods and methodology.

However, where drug crops have been eradicated and drug production has been eliminated without the prior introduction and establishment of attainable opportunities for alternative livelihoods and food security, substantially increased suffering may result. And if widespread increases in illness, hunger, and poverty result from the forced elimination of illicit crop cultivation, it would be misleading to claim that the initiative was successful, no matter how many hectares of coca or poppy were destroyed.

Moreover, in such a case declarations of success regarding the elimination of illicit production might also be wholly premature. This is because eradication and suppression of illicit production without previously developed opportunities for alternative livelihoods exacerbates the fundamental drivers of drug crop cultivation. With increased poverty and food insecurity, there is a greater likelihood that the desperate population will eventually resume illicit crop production in order to earn money to buy food, and the success of prior drug suppression initiatives will not be sustained.

This portrait may accurately describe some of the process that has transpired in both Myanmar and Laos, two countries that are currently experiencing rapid increases in opium production. The extent to which counterproductive dynamics were set in motion by premature crop eradication and have subsequently contributed to utterly failed drug control efforts in Laos will be carefully considered in the case study of that nation.

There are two different tactical branches of contemporary international drug supply control strategy: one is based on law enforcement and eradication, and the other involves the promotion of a wide variety of AD programs and projects. At best, these two branches are able to work in concert and can compliment each other. At worst, they work

at cross-purposes and render all efforts unproductive, or even counterproductive. As discussed throughout this paper, proper proportion and sequencing of AD and eradication operations is crucial.

It is important to note that many international anti-drug efforts incorporate both types of tactical approach – sometimes referred to as “the carrot and the stick” -- in various proportions. But one should also realize that it is “the stick” that has been featured overwhelmingly in international anti-drug policy and supply control initiatives in recent decades. Producer-countries are tracked, rated, and dealt with primarily in terms of law enforcement and number of hectares that they have eradicated. In other words, for many years, militarized eradication operations and enforcement of the prohibition regime have vigorously dominated international anti-drug policy.

There are often AD projects running concurrently with eradication and law enforcement operations, but it is the latter that carries the momentum and main focus of the primary players. Consequently, it is eradication and militarization that continue to capture the lion’s share of financial sponsorship for anti-drug efforts abroad. Dramatic center stage pronouncements from the White House and the State Department implicating dangerous “Drug Majors” trump boring, back-page bureaucratic assessments from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), recommending more subsidies for AD projects in the Third World.

Leaders in producer nations clearly understand that officials from the US and the UN want to see their governments dedicated to robust eradication efforts, with impressive numbers to prove it. This kind of action plays well for everybody, and has been one of the most apparent results of the White House “Certification Process” of producer nations.

At the end of the process, the President either validates a government for its commitment to anti-drug initiatives and qualifies them for aid money and military equipment, or he condemns their behavior and leaves them high and dry.⁵⁶

Recently however, there has been some official acknowledgement of the downside repercussions of forced eradication. For example, such recognition was signified by Richard Holbrooke's critical statements and his suspension of eradication operations by the US in Afghanistan.⁵⁷

For many years, alternative development has been marginalized by a tough drug war mindset, alongside a facile bureaucratic drive to record large numbers representing officially destroyed crops. Progress in establishing AD and viable licit crop substitution is much slower, less sensational, and less easily quantified. Consequently, it makes a less ideal political football for politicians in all involved countries. Sadly, this has translated into insufficient international political support and inconsistent financial assistance for AD in illicit crop producing countries. This unfortunate record will be well documented in the exposition of my case histories. Nonetheless, there is ample evidence that it is a development-oriented agenda, subordinately buttressed by law enforcement, that holds the most promise for lasting change and sustained reductions of coca and poppy cultivation.

⁵⁶ Note: There is a provisional addendum to the directive that states that the President may use his discretion if he wishes to extend aid to a government that has failed to be positively certified in this process, and has been listed as a "Drug Major." Consequently, most offenders do continue to receive some amount of US aid.

⁵⁷ Laura Rozen, "Holbrooke: I've Changed Bush's Failed Afghan Drug Policy," *The Cable/Foreign Policy*, July 30, 2009. Accessed 11-1-14, http://thecable.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2009/07/30/holbrooke_ive_changed_bushs_failed_afghan_drug_policy_0.

One way that law enforcement can effectively facilitate and support successful AD is through interdiction and disruption of the drug trafficking supply chain. Through the arrest of traffickers and the destruction of processing labs, farm-gate prices for coca and poppy can be driven down. It has been demonstrated that when there are no accessible processing facilities or available buyers, future production is discouraged as farmers are forced to dump their illicit harvest at greatly reduced prices. This dynamic squares with market principles of supply and demand – if the demand from wholesale buyers is not present, prices for illicit crops will be deflated. And if the price that farmers are able to obtain for drug crops is significantly deflated, they will be proportionately disincentivized to cultivate those crops. Likewise, the cultivation of legal alternative crops would become more attractive to farmers as the profit potential of illicit crops was diminished.

Finally, it must be noted that although there are examples of very successful alternative development, the overall record is not terribly impressive. Sometimes AD efforts can even make matters worse.⁵⁸ In each of the three case studies presented here, there are examples of AD initiatives that were attempted and failed to sustain reductions in illicit crop cultivation. In these instances, the composition of apparently ineffectual AD programs and relevant circumstances surrounding AD implementation efforts will be closely studied.

⁵⁸ Note: AD transportation infrastructure has the potential to increase the efficiency of illicit traffic, for example. Or alternatively, some farmers who were paid to discontinue raising illicit crops in certain areas as part of AD programs have sometimes been documented taking the money and complying in one area while simultaneously establishing illegal cultivation in other new areas. These are only two of many scenarios that involve types or aspects of AD that can be counterproductive. Some observers have pointed out that even when AD is quite successful (and sometimes *especially* when it is successful) and illicit crops are suppressed in a region or country, market forces and the balloon effect still apply and limit overall positive outcomes.

Aside from his history of opium, Pierre-Arnaud Chouvy has authored writings that are definitive to a critical discussion of AD, and other methods of illicit crop reduction. His recent article in the *Journal of Drug Issues* contributes an analysis of three different supply control tactics that have frequently been used: the forced eradication of illicit crops, opium bans, and alternative development.⁵⁹

Exemplified by some of the scenarios discussed above, Chouvy suggests that unintended repercussions of the aforementioned strategies have the capacity to decisively influence the overall outcomes of drug suppression efforts. He maintains that these tactics, and the particular ways in which they are implemented, affect poor farmers of illicit crops in different ways that carry the potential to facilitate either the success or failure of a nation's drug suppression efforts. In the course of my research, I observe how Chouvy's conclusion relates to examples of AD and other types of drug supply control initiatives in each of my three cases.

In the preceding overview, I have introduced and outlined the basic facts, history, policy, phenomena and dynamics intrinsic to research concerning illicit crop production and attempts to control the supply of illicit coca and opium. Briefly summarized, conflict, lawlessness, poverty, a lack of development, and food insecurity seem to be prerequisite environmental conditions for illicit crop cultivation. These characteristics are mutually reinforcing. However, it is possible to turn them around, one by one, to create a positive synergy capable of underwriting effective drug supply control efforts.

⁵⁹ Pierre-Arnaud Chouvy, "A Typology of the Unintended Consequences of Drug Crop Reduction," *Journal of Drug Issues*, Vol.43, No. 2 (2012): 216-230.

Finally, there are two basic types of tactics that have been employed in an effort to alter these endemic conditions in producer-nations: 1) crop eradication and law enforcement, and 2) alternative development. Ideally, these two tactics compliment each other. Less ideally, and perhaps more historically common, they can clash and make the situation even worse. In fact, many believe that increases in the global supply of illicit drugs have been driven by aggressive eradication operations that have forced narcotraffickers to become much more sophisticated and greatly expand their networks and expertise. This characterization applies to the dynamic of the last forty years or so, since Richard Nixon first declared a war on drugs.

Regarding Hypotheses

Because there is a frequent incidence of covariance between different independent variables that tend to cluster around drug production, as explained in the preceding section, classical hypotheses concerning the direct effect of one variable on the dependent variable is not possible. Instead, I establish an ideal type of illicit crop cultivation and drug-producing environment, and I illustrate the adherence or non-adherence to that typology through process tracing and comparative case study. Non-adherence may result from a process of successfully altering environmental factors through drug control efforts and AD programs, for example. By the conclusion, sufficient qualitative comparison and analysis has been made to allow for the positing of generalizations concerning causal factors in the success or failure of illicit crop reduction and drug supply control efforts.

Regarding Research Methods

The two research methods that I have chosen for the investigation of my research question are both case-oriented methods. In the first phase of research, I employ a within-case method of process tracing, followed by a second phase involving a comparative method of analysis among all three of my case studies.

The following sections contain expositions of three countries and their histories regarding illicit crop cultivation and drug supply control efforts. The first of those countries has a long record of successfully curtailing illicit crop production (Thailand), while the second nation is a case of nearly complete failure, with current dramatic rises in illegal crop cultivation and drug production (Laos). The third country profiled has a promising, yet relatively brief and tenuous hold on successful drug supply control (Colombia), and exhibits characteristics reminiscent of both the cases of success and failure presented here.

By virtue of comparing and contrasting the causal variables surrounding illicit crop cultivation and drug supply control in the first two countries, causal variables are more easily identified in the third case. In other words, as a consequence of understanding the variables and dynamics involved in success and failure in the first two cases, the main determinants of enduring success or gradual deterioration and failure of drug supply control in Colombia become apparent.

In tracing the processes in each case, I parse through individual national histories regarding opium or coca production. An effort is made to identify what independent

variables are most prominently in play before, during, and after the formation and execution of their supply control policies. I consider all the prerequisite environmental characteristics previously discussed, as well as factors surrounding law enforcement and alternative development initiatives, as important independent variables with the potential to influence the success or failure of anti-drug efforts.

Throughout the course of process tracing, I pay close attention to what may be characterized in the literature as key moments or periods in a nation's process, leading to success or failure of drug control initiatives. I attempt to identify the causal influence of specific variables at these pivotal times.

Political scientist David Collier has called process tracing a “fundamental tool” for “within-case analysis based on qualitative data,”⁶⁰ and I believe that process tracing is a logical choice of methodologies to identify and analyze the independent variables in play during a nation's history of illicit crop production and drug supply control efforts. Collier also states that the method is valuable to the researcher as a tool for “gaining insight into causal mechanisms,”⁶¹ which is the primary objective of my research.⁶²

⁶⁰ David Collier, “Understanding Process Tracing,” *PS: Political Science and Politics*, Vol. 44, No. 4 (2011): 823.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 824.

⁶² Note: For more on the value of process tracing to determine causal variables in qualitative research and its increasing prominence in the field, see the “Discussion” section of “Process-Tracing,” *A User's Guide to Political Science*, Wesleyan University, Government Dept. Accessed 11-3-14, <http://govthesis.site.wesleyan.edu/research/methods-and-analysis/analyzing-qualitative-data/process-tracing/>.

Case study is an explanatory analysis of a person, group, or event. The method benefits from the discreet or finite nature of a subject in attempting to explain the causes of a particular historical outcome, such as the success or failure of a drug suppression initiative. In turn, case-oriented research involving an analytical comparison of separate instances of a similar outcome is useful in making generalizations concerning the causes of the outcome.⁶³ After tracing the processes within each case leading to success or failure in illicit crop reduction and drug control efforts, the next logical step is to comparatively analyze my findings by cross-referencing conclusions regarding causal determinants for specific outcomes.

Finally, in comparing my three cases, I have the benefit of variation on the dependent variable: cases of failure, in addition to examples of successful drug supply control. Therefore, not only am I able to compare conclusions about the importance of particular variables in the two successful countries with each other, but I can also cross-reference those conclusions with my findings concerning their own past failure, and current failure in Laos. Examples of past failure in Thailand and Colombia are educational when contrasted with their currently successful drug supply control efforts, and when compared with current failure in Laos. I believe that this exercise helps to further clarify the relative influence of particular independent variables on the dependent variable in the following cases.

⁶³ Charles Ragin, *The Comparative Method: Moving Beyond Qualitative and Quantitative Strategies* (Berkeley: University of California, 1987), 35.

Chapter 2. Opium Cultivation and Heroin Production in Southeast Asia: The Golden Triangle

Poppy cultivation and opium production have been a cultural tradition in parts of Southern China for centuries. As early as the ninth century BCE, southern migration from China brought diverse groups of people to Mainland Southeast Asia, eventually including the Hmong, who were skilled opium producers.⁶⁴ Political persecution in the mid-nineteenth century sent larger waves of Hmong, Yao, Akha, and other tribes southward from China. These tribes brought a knowledge of opium poppy cultivation to the region, and they settled mainly in the highland areas that are most suitable for growing the flowering plant. These slash-and-burn agriculturalists produced opium and other goods for regional traders and caravanning groups like the Hui, who traveled and traded along networks originally established through the centuries-old tea trade.⁶⁵

Meanwhile, the reigning colonial powers attempted to tightly restrict and control opium production within this region throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in order to protect their lucrative monopolies in the thriving consumer markets. Therefore, they imported Indian, Turkish, and Persian opium to tax and sell in their colonies on the Indochinese peninsula, while discouraging regional production. As a consequence, large-scale production of opium in Southeast Asia did not occur until after World War II.

⁶⁴ Chouvy, *Opium*, 14.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 15.

For a variety of reasons, it was around this time when the French and the British both finally decided to change course, and encourage legal opium production within their Southeast Asian colonies for regional sale. Thus, the modern opium industry in much of this zone -- Burma and Laos, for example -- began to grow under governmental sponsorship.⁶⁶ Henceforth, even as the colonial era declined, the second half of the twentieth century hosted a series of events that facilitated the continual expansion of regional opium and heroin production.

One momentous event that spurred dramatic increases in Southeast Asian opium production was the victory of the Communists in China in 1949, and their ensuing well-enforced suppression of opium cultivation. The sudden elimination of the world's premier powerhouse opium supplier left a huge void in production that demanded to be filled. This had a phenomenal incentivizing effect on farmers and producers across the Indochinese peninsula, stimulating a boom in regional opium production, and the emergence of the Golden Triangle.⁶⁷

Author Alfred W. McCoy also identifies the UN-led abolishment of legal state monopolies and sales of opium in Southeast Asia, between 1950 and 1961, as a pivotal historical event that created the formidable global supplier known as the "Golden Triangle."⁶⁸ At that point, free from official state control and oversight, intelligence

⁶⁶ Chouvy, *Opium*, 16-17.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 173.

⁶⁸ McCoy, "Coercion and its Unintended Consequences: A Study of Heroin Trafficking in Southeast and South West Asia," 203.

agencies across the region sanctioned allied paramilitary groups to run the newly illegal opium trafficking operations.⁶⁹ Not long afterward, in order to supply US soldiers fighting in Vietnam, a cluster of heroin refining laboratories were established in the Golden Triangle in 1969-1970.⁷⁰ These labs later produced exports for both the American and European drug markets.

US Vice-Secretary of State Marshall Green first used the term “Golden Triangle” to describe the swath of rugged territory in the borderlands between Burma, Laos, and Thailand in a press conference on July 12th, 1971. His reference to the precious metal may have been intended to highlight the fact that big money in opium and heroin had been emanating from the area.⁷¹ But Green may also have been alluding to militia in the tri-state border region, commissioned by the Burmese government, that had been trading opium for bars of pure gold.⁷²

In any case, the problematic situation in Southeast Asia was soon compounded by the commencement of Richard Nixon’s “War on Drugs” in 1972, and the dissolution of the drug trafficking networks dubbed “The French Connection.” Reduced global supply of opiates due to the coerced cessation of Turkish opium production and heroin manufacture

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 204.

⁷¹ Chouvy, *Opium*, 23.

⁷² Lintner, 11.

in Marseilles laboratories inadvertently stimulated increased production elsewhere, especially in the Golden Triangle.⁷³

In summary, longstanding cultural tradition converged with modern industry, innovations in transportation and commerce, economic laws of supply and demand, and geopolitics to create a boom in post-World War II opium production in Southeast Asia and the Golden Triangle. A strong and pervasive opium culture had already been cultivated and reinforced in the region through the aggressive promotion of mass consumer demand over more than two centuries of colonial rule, ending with many years of officially sponsored large-scale production that continued after independence. By the time of the coordinated international drug control and prohibition regime in the latter half of the twentieth century, the roots of opium use and production ran long and deep in Southeast Asia. In addition, illicit production in the Golden Triangle was sometimes vigorously stimulated by a displacement effect caused by reduced opium and heroin production in other places, such as China, Iran, Turkey, and the labs in Marseilles.

Throughout the Cold War, major powers repeatedly found it strategically advantageous to forge alliances with criminal entities. These dubious partnerships often involved the drug trade, and governments sheltering, or even facilitating and exploiting, illegal drug trafficking operations.⁷⁴ Similarly, governments often condoned drug

⁷³ McCoy, "Coercion and its Unintended Consequences: A Study of Heroin Trafficking in Southeast and South West Asia," 204-205.

⁷⁴ McCoy, "Coercion and its Unintended Consequences: A Study of Heroin Trafficking in Southeast and South West Asia," 203-204;

production and trafficking by allied foreign military factions in order to finance their operations.⁷⁵ Also, it has not been historically uncommon for state governments to finance their own covert military operations through direct involvement in the production and trafficking of illicit drugs.⁷⁶ All three varieties of clandestine government sponsorship of the drug trade transpired in Southeast Asia and contributed significantly to the rise and preeminence of regional opium and heroin production in the 1970s.

Concurrent with the international prohibition regime, sporadic clandestine sponsorship of large-scale illicit crop cultivation, drug production, and drug trafficking by the US and other world governments subverted drug-control objectives in particular situations and in general, and served to proliferate illegal networking and complicate the problem.⁷⁷ As we shall see in the following case studies of Thailand and Laos, opium and heroin production and drug trafficking in the Golden Triangle was frequently advanced by duplicitous government policies in the past.

Chouvy, *Opium*, 94-98. Note: Chouvy recounts the long and fascinating relationship between the CIA and mob kingpin Charles ‘Lucky’ Luciano. After his release and deportation to Sicily in 1946, Luciano was contracted by the CIA to use his mob connections in France to break socialist union-led dock strikes in Marseilles, and facilitate the French government’s continued export of arms and supplies to Indochina. To quash the strikes and keep the ships coming and going, he enlisted the help of Corsican mobsters who were already importing opium from Indochina and Turkey. These imports were refined to heroin in Marseilles labs for export to the American market. Luciano recognized the potential capacity and opportunity inherent in the situation and ran with the ball, as he helped to establish the city as the heroin capital of Europe. Chouvy explains that it was these Marseilles syndicates that grew into the notorious “French Connection” and supplied the bulk of the US Heroin market for the next two decades.

⁷⁵ Chouvy, *Opium*, 96.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 95-96.

⁷⁷ Chouvy, *Opium*, 65; McCoy, *The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia*.

Thailand: Can It Be Done Elsewhere?

Regarded by many as the best example of successful illicit crop reduction, Thailand's alternative development programs and drug supply control initiatives have decreased domestic opium production and kept it at negligible levels for over fifteen years.⁷⁸ This is an impressive achievement considering the large quantities of Thai opium and heroin that were produced during much of the latter half of the twentieth century. But Thailand's significance in the Southeast Asian drug trade was not limited simply to that of opium supplier. For many years Thailand was also the main headquarters and trafficking hub for some of the biggest heroin kingpins and financiers in the Golden Triangle.

Although the successful reduction of illicit crops and suppression of opium production in Thailand is the issue of main interest here, the nature of the research requires that attention be paid to the totality of historic national involvement with drug production and drug trafficking, since they are all parts of a larger integrated whole. This complex interrelatedness is illustrated in the following brief overview of all Thai activity related to illegal opium and heroin, from cultivation to commerce. Subsequently, Thai opium

⁷⁸ UN Office on Drugs and Crime, *Southeast Asia Opium Survey 2013: Lao PDR, Myanmar*. Accessed 2-13-14, http://www.unodc.org/documents/southeastasiaandpacific/Publications/2013/SEA_Opiu_m_Survey_2013_web.pdf. Note: The table on page five of the survey, "Figure 1: Opium poppy cultivation in South-East Asia, 1998-2013 (Hectares)," shows Thai cultivation has been very stable and well under 1,000 ha during the entire period.

production and illicit crop reduction efforts will be specifically examined in greater detail.

Thailand and the Triangle

The zone known as the Golden Triangle, and most of the rest of the Indochinese peninsula, collectively experienced a series of events in the late twentieth century that continually facilitated the expansion of illegal opium and heroin industries in the region. Some of the major events were discussed above, in the sectional introduction to Southeast Asian drug production. But Burma, Laos, and Thailand also each possessed their own unique cultural, economic, and political conditions, and were influenced by their own unique historical events that shaped their involvement in the drug trade. In Thailand, for example, members of specific ethnic minority groups factored decisively in the country's contemporary involvement in the opium and heroin trade -- from the lowliest subsistence farmers to the most powerful crime bosses.

Thailand has long been home to the world's largest community of Teochiu, or Chiu-Chao peoples.⁷⁹ A part of the Chinese diaspora, the Teochiu have a lengthy history as a politically privileged merchant and noble class in Thailand. Perhaps the wealthiest and most powerful of all the world's underground networks, the Teochiu syndicates had the finances and political connections needed to achieve a near monopoly on opium and heroin trafficking in the Golden Triangle. Kingpins from major Hong Kong-based

⁷⁹ Chouvy, *Opium*, 66.

Teochiu triads invested heavily in the operations of Teochiu in Thailand, and helped position the country at the center of the drug trade in Southeast Asia in the late 1960s and 1970s.⁸⁰

The history of opium and heroin production in Thailand and Southeast Asia is deeply entangled with the complex political and military history of the region, and often indistinguishable. Correspondingly, the time of the Second World War was an eventful and influential period for all nations on the Indochinese peninsula, and political machinations and military strategy often became inseparably entwined with the trade in illegal narcotics during this era.

A series of momentous events that exemplify this phenomenon began when Japan invaded and occupied British Burma in 1942. With Japanese support, Thailand annexed a large swath of the Shan States, and Thai Field Marshall Phin Choonhavan assumed the role of military governor of the territory. Suddenly in control of some of the most productive opium land in Southeast Asia, Field Marshall Phin made use of his close connections with the most powerful Teochiu syndicates to increase regional drug traffic.⁸¹

The defeat of the Chinese nationalist forces in 1949 was another event that had great bearing on the future of Thailand and Burma, and the steady rise of opium production in the Golden Triangle. Several hundred troops from the 3rd and 5th Regiments of the 93rd Division of the Kuomintang of China (KMT) refused to surrender and follow Chiang

⁸⁰ Ibid., 67.

⁸¹ Ibid., 67-68.

Kaishek to Taiwan.⁸² Dubbed “The Lost Army,” these soldiers fought their way out of Yunnan and across the border, where they took refuge in the Shan States of Burma. Sponsored as a Chinese “liberation army,” they eventually received reinforcements from Taiwan that swelled their numbers to around 12,000 troops by the end of 1953.⁸³

Already allied with Field Marshall Phin and involved in the drug trade, the KMT seized control of Shan’s most fertile opium-producing areas, where they persuaded the tribal farmers to increase poppy cultivation.⁸⁴ Settled in the Shan hills, the KMT forged an even closer, long-lasting commercial and military relationship with Field Marshall Phin.⁸⁵ Sporadically attacking Chinese Communist troops in futile raids across the Chinese border, these KMT soldiers had the approval of the Thai government and the CIA, and were chiefly financed by the opium trade and Taiwan for many years.⁸⁶

After 1961, when the Chinese Republic cut off nearly all funding for the far-flung units of the 93rd, most units that remained on the peninsula supported themselves exclusively through drug trafficking.⁸⁷ For years, the KMT secured Burmese opium and

⁸² Surath Jinakul, "Perspective: 'Lost army' at home in the Mountains of Peace," *Bangkok Post*, July 17, 2005.

⁸³ Lintner, 7.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Chouvy, *Opium*, 68.

⁸⁶ McCoy, *The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia*, 126-145.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 318-319.

heroin exports to Thailand, where the Thai Army and Police helped Teochiu operatives ship them safely to their final destinations.⁸⁸

After the majority of the KMT's 93rd Division was routed from the Shan region by tens of thousands of Chinese Communists and Burmese Army troops in January 1961, they fled south, and established new bases along the Thai border and in the hills of northern Thailand. From their new positions, the KMT were able to effectively regulate trafficking routes and heavily tax opium heading to Thailand.⁸⁹ Coordinating operations between these Thai-based units and about 6,000 of their troops that had managed to remain in the Shan States, the KMT eventually controlled nearly all of Burma's opium trade.⁹⁰

In summary, Thailand's powerful Teochiu community, Thai annexation of some of the most fertile opium-producing areas of the Shan States, Thai alliance with the KMT, and their own domestic opium production were all factors that combined to place Thailand prominently in the Golden Triangle drug trade.

⁸⁸ Chouvy, *Opium*, 69. Note: Chouvy explains that after seizing the position of Prime Minister, Phin made his son-in-law director-general of the national police force, and another crony became commander-in-chief of the armies. Drug trafficking had climbed to the very top of the political ladder, backed by law enforcement and military leadership.

⁸⁹ Chouvy, *Opium*, 65-66.

⁹⁰ "Chronology of Chinese-Burmese Relations," *The Irrawaddy*, Jan. 1, 2003. Accessed 2-20-14, http://www2.irrawaddy.org/research_show.php?art_id=446. See also, Chouvy, *Opium*, 65.

By 1946, Thailand was the only country in Southeast Asia that still maintained an official monopoly on domestic opium commerce.⁹¹ Supplemented by limited domestic production, the government trade had been sustained primarily by foreign imports for nearly a hundred years. However, available imports became scarce in the 1940s and early 1950s due to wartime disruptions in global commerce and the sudden curtailment of Chinese and Iranian opium production.⁹² In order to shore up the supply, meet demand, and keep the treasury primed, the Thai government actively promoted opium poppy cultivation in the northern highlands of the country for the first time, beginning in the 1940s.⁹³

Technically, opium cultivation had been legal in Thailand after 1855, but legitimate poppy growers were subject to severe governmental restriction and regulation.⁹⁴ After nearly forty years of opium prohibition, King Mongkut finally established a royal opium franchise in Thailand in 1852, acquiescing to the colonial powers and economic forces that had been pushing huge quantities of opium to people all across Southeast Asia.⁹⁵

Reminiscent of Britain and France, the Thai government aimed to buy low, sell high, and overflow state coffers with their opium monopoly. Around the turn of the century, authorized growers became obliged to sell their wares to the newly formed Royal Opium Monopoly, often at artificially low prices. But relatively onerous regulation and limited

⁹¹ McCoy, *The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia*, 137.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ McCoy, *The Politics of Heroin: CIA Complicity in the Global Drug Trade*, 103.

⁹⁴ Renard, 11-13.

⁹⁵ Lintner, 1.

government reimbursement incentivized clandestine opium cultivation, best suited to the secluded regions of the northern highlands.⁹⁶

Prior to the 1940s, much of the clandestine opium production in the northern Thai hills was conducted by antecedents of the tribal people who joined them in greater numbers after World War II. Opium farming was a cultural tradition for several of these different ethnic groups. They were agriculturalist tribes like the Hmong, Lahu, and Lisu among others, and practiced slash-and-burn, or swiddening techniques of agriculture.⁹⁷ These farmers had the knowledge and skills necessary to avail themselves of the new government-sanctioned opportunity in the highlands, and Thai cultivation and opium production steadily rose through the late 1940s and early 1950s as a result.⁹⁸

In addition to official production in the Thai hills, the British and the French had already been promoting opium production in Burma and Laos beginning a few years earlier. Collectively, they drove up output on the Indochinese peninsula by 600 percent in four years, from 1940-1944. Though output still remained at relatively low levels during this time compared to that of future years, production continued to steadily rise.⁹⁹

For nearly three centuries, Southeast Asian opium users had been supplied mostly with product from India, Iran, Turkey and China. But within the first decade after the war, due to the industry of highland farmers, enough opium was produced in Southeast

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Renard, 27.

⁹⁸ McCoy, *The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia*, 137.

⁹⁹ McCoy, *The Politics of Heroin: CIA Complicity in the Global Drug Trade*, 122.

Asia so that the region could supply its burgeoning population of addicts independent of foreign imports.¹⁰⁰

Aside from this dubious achievement, it is important to note that legalization and governmental advocacy of opium production across the Indochinese peninsula initiated a process that transformed the nature of highland agriculture in many tribal communities. As a result, populations of highland farmers in these communities transitioned from simple subsistence farming to an increased reliance on the cultivation of opium as a cash crop.¹⁰¹

In addition to officially directing the further entrenchment of poppy cultivation and the opium industry in the northern hills from the 1940s until 1959, the Thai government's aggressive reforestation of fallow rice fields in the region represented another mid-twentieth century policy that eventually resulted in increased illicit crop cultivation.¹⁰² Reforestation reduced the amount of available paddy land, and eventually created a significant shortage of rice production in the Thai hills.¹⁰³ Similar to illicit crop producers everywhere who experience food scarcity and food insecurity, the highland tribes in Thailand responded by growing more opium poppy for cash to buy food. Opium cultivation enabled these subsistence farmers to earn enough cash to buy the rice that they were unable to grow for themselves due to the decreased availability of paddy land.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 119.

¹⁰² Renard, 28.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

Through their reforestation operations, the Thai government not only reenergized illicit production in the highlands, but also reinforced rural dependency on opium as a vital cash crop. These conclusions are generally supported by the UNODC, which found that the level of opium poppy cultivation in Southeast Asia is directly influenced by the amount of paddy land available for rice cultivation.¹⁰⁴

Another dynamic, commonly found in remote drug-producing regions, involves poor farmers who annually need to borrow money in order to finance operations at the start of a new farming cycle. In many cases, local lenders will only loan money for the cultivation of lucrative drug crops, not food crops. In Thailand, they often insisted on in-kind repayment of the loan in opium.¹⁰⁵ This dictate also bolstered illicit crop cultivation in the northern hill country.

By the 1960s and 1970s, large-scale opium production was well established in the highlands of Thailand, reinforced and driven by some typical environmental factors. Poverty, food insecurity and food scarcity, a lack of economic development and legal alternatives in the region, and the remote and undeveloped nature of the geography itself were all conditions that predominated in the northern highlands of Thailand. All of these characteristics conform to the ideal type of a drug-producing region or nation, and create a setting highly conducive to illicit crop cultivation and drug production. Fortunately, there were also other positive conditions and attitudes inherent in Thailand that

¹⁰⁴ UN Office on Drugs and Crime, *Opium Poppy Cultivation in the Golden Triangle: Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand*, October, 2006: 91-92. Accessed 2-11-14, https://www.unodc.org/pdf/research/Golden_triangle_2006.pdf.

¹⁰⁵ Renard, 28.

eventually enabled the government to successfully reduce widespread illicit cultivation in the hill country.

Slow and Steady Change in the Thai Highlands

The government of Thailand became more concerned about highland development and tribal activity in the 1950s, primarily for reasons of national security. They began to worry about the estrangement of the hill people from Thai society and their possible inclination to sympathize with militant insurgents spilling over the border from Laos.¹⁰⁶ In 1965, the loyalty of the hill tribes became an even more pressing concern in Thailand after a violent homegrown guerilla movement emerged from its training grounds in the forests and mountains of the northeastern highlands.¹⁰⁷

Prior to that time, poverty and a lack of development in the hills had preserved the cultural isolation of the tribes, and their alienation was augmented by an adversarial tension with government officials. Mutual animosity had also increased when the Royal Forest Department (RFD) intensified reforestation operations in tribal agricultural areas.¹⁰⁸ Eventually, widespread illegal opium production in the northern hills became a concern after national prohibition in 1959.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 5-6.

¹⁰⁷ Thomas, 17.

¹⁰⁸ Renard, 5.

Through the intervening years, from 1959 to 1965, a hodgepodge of various special projects were set up through designated governmental departments for highland development and tribal welfare, but there was no overarching grand strategy for comprehensive highland development. Committees came and went, but no real headway was made.

Finally, the Thai government asked the international community for assistance in researching the highland tribes, and commenced an in-depth study of socioeconomic conditions among the hill tribes in 1965-1966.¹⁰⁹ The following year, in 1967, the UN conducted a survey to investigate the socioeconomic needs of people in the opium-growing regions of northern Thailand.¹¹⁰ Thus began a longstanding alliance between the Thai government, intergovernmental organizations, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), international donors, and the highland tribes of northern Thailand.

Although there were many important contributors, no one was more consequential to the success of the country's AD projects and opium reduction initiatives than King Bhumibol Adulyadej of Thailand. King Bhumibol took a strong early interest in highland development beginning in the late 1950s.¹¹¹ Aside from concerns about national security, he appeared to genuinely care about the welfare of the people living in the hills. Beginning in the late 1960s, his frequent visits to the region to meet and talk with the

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 7.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 73.

highlanders inspired their loyalty and trust, and engendered their spirit of cooperation in alternative development projects.¹¹²

But the King was not simply an effective goodwill ambassador with a soft heart. He was also a true visionary in regard to several different aspects of alternative development and the necessary requirements for progress and successful opium reduction in the northern highlands. To begin with, King Bhumibol had the foresight to realize that the establishment of effective and sustainable alternative development in the region was a long-term proposition. In 1982, the King told a dismayed high UN official, accustomed to bureaucratic deadlines and expedited results, that His Majesty believed it would take at least thirty years to complete the task of establishing effective AD.¹¹³ Whether or not the King's timetable was precisely accurate, he correctly realized that an area as wild and undeveloped as the northern Thai hill country required an extended commitment for the successful design and implementation of a comprehensive AD regime.

At the start of the process, there were no roads into the hills, and the people had no schools or organized health care. Tribal highlanders were not official citizens, did not speak the Thai language, and had no formal relationship with the Thai economy whatsoever. No one knew what alternative crops might potentially suffice as workable replacements for opium in the highlands, and their ultimate viability would require relatively sophisticated standardization, commercialization, and marketing, not to

¹¹² Ibid., 73, 165.

¹¹³ Ibid., 115.

mention roads for trucking the produce out of the hills.¹¹⁴ The obstacles loomed large, far too large to expect quick results.

Revered King Bhumibol provided a patient and constant moral leadership in Thailand that helped make opium replacement a national priority through the years. As such, the Thai government and the private sector invested heavily in the project. In the 1970s, international donors and NGOs followed suit, donating hundreds of millions of dollars to the effort in Thailand.¹¹⁵

A prime example of King Bhumibol's visionary outlook on alternative development was his resolute involvement of the hill people in decision-making processes, and he repeatedly stressed the importance of their participation in all aspects of the AD programs. Perhaps partly borne of the genuine affection that he had for the highlanders, his was also a keenly pragmatic stance. Apparently devoid of bureaucratic arrogance, he knew that if the highlanders didn't like what was coming down the pike, a program simply wouldn't work. Beginning in 1972, the King brought government officials from different agencies together at meetings with area residents to discuss relevant issues and projects.¹¹⁶

Again, the King was ahead of the pack. It wasn't until about 1980 that development agencies around the world reassessed their failures, and Robert Chambers and his associates devised a process known as Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA). Chambers had concluded that many development projects had failed in the past due to an elite top-

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 114.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 119.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 103.

down dominance that excluded input from the rural inhabitants of a given area. PRA was a dramatic revelation to many involved with international development, and it became an influential new paradigm.¹¹⁷

One set of interrelated variables that is closely associated with drug crop cultivation includes armed conflict, instability, and a lack of authoritative state control. These characteristics plague nearly all major drug-producing countries. Correspondingly, illicit crop farming in the rugged Thai highlands took place in a rough and unstable environment during its heyday. Apart from battles with insurgents affiliated with the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT), highland Hmong occasionally engaged government troops in armed conflict through the late 1960s and early 1970s.¹¹⁸

The Thai government worried that routine confrontation and animosity between officials and highland tribesmen could play into the hands of CPT rebels and push the hill tribes into the ranks of the insurgency. But from an early stage, the government also recognized that developing the highlands could be an effective way to insulate hill tribes from a susceptibility to guerilla recruitment. If poor highland farmers were given a better standard of living, the opportunity cost of joining guerilla activity might become discouragingly high.

Meanwhile, the Communist Party of Thailand steadily built a movement within the nation that acquired a powerful momentum after a military crackdown on student

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 102-103.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 5.

demonstrators and consequent seizure of power in October 1976.¹¹⁹ The insurgency spread from the northeast to other regions of the country and added armed cadres at a rate averaging 6 to 10 percent per year. At the close of 1978, the movement had almost 14,000 armed troops located in 52 of Thailand's 72 provinces, with tens of thousands more active supporters around the country.¹²⁰

For the government of Thailand, securing the northern highland region became an objective that was crucial to ending the insurgency. Guerilla base camps operated in the sheltered wilds of the northlands, and rebels could also mount attacks and then run across the border for sanctuary in neighboring Laos. The long northern border with Laos had been beyond effective Thai government control and had provided domestic rebel access to supplies and support from the Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese. In order to end the insurgency, it was essential that the Thai government secure the border area and deny CPT rebels northern passage to supply depots and training operations in Laos.¹²¹

Finally, around 1979, the Thai government began to reformulate its counter-insurgency strategy. In the early eighties, policy guidelines were issued by the prime minister that deemphasized militarization and introduced a redoubled effort to better develop the northern highlands as well as other impoverished rural regions of the country. In an attempt to undercut popular support for the rebels, action was taken to expel corrupt

¹¹⁹ Thomas, 17.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 17-18.

¹²¹ Ibid., 19.

provincial officials and introduce new socioeconomic programs to help the rural poor in Thailand.¹²²

The new guidelines also offered amnesty for insurgents who would lay down their arms and defect. Defectors were invited to become “participants in Thai national development,” and were promised safety and a preservation of their civil rights. They were even promised funds to help them assimilate into civilian society.¹²³

Such overtures were calculated to exploit an increased hardship the insurgency was experiencing at that time. At that point the CPT had been undergoing a traumatic factionalization of their movement that was causing confused disorganization and lowered morale. Meanwhile China, their primary financier, had established diplomatic relations with Thailand in 1975 and discontinued CPT funding.¹²⁴

In conjunction with the ideological disarray of the CPT, infighting, and a sudden loss of most funding, the government’s amnesty program was timed for maximum effect. Along with an easing of armed governmental provocation due to revised Thai military tactics, these factors led to very limited organized guerilla activity in Thailand by the mid 1980s.¹²⁵ An end to insurgent activity and violence in the highland areas meant that

¹²² Ibid., 21.

¹²³ Ibid. Note: It is interesting to observe the recurring Thai inclination to explicitly involve the other party as “participants,” attempting to actively engender feelings of partnership and co-creation in achieving objectives.

¹²⁴ “Sino-Thai relations have come a long way,” *The Nation*, June 30, 2009. Accessed 2-20-14, http://www.nationmultimedia.com/2009/06/30/opinion/opinion_30106359.php.

¹²⁵ Thomas, 18.

alternative development projects had an opportunity to proceed more effectively, in a peaceful and stable environment.

It is apparent that Thailand entered a new phase in its consideration and treatment of the highlands and highland peoples, starting in the late 1950s and early 1960s. From this time forward, many AD initiatives in the northern highlands began to address the drivers of illicit cultivation.

From this time, one is able to trace the slow process of remediating a lack of alternatives for highland farmers through crop replacement and infrastructure development programs. The area gradually became less and less physically, culturally, and economically isolated as roads were constructed and relationships with mainstream Thai society were forged. Highlanders began to increasingly participate with government officials and other professionals through projects in health care, education, agriculture and marketing. Importantly, the causes of poverty, food scarcity and food insecurity were either directly or indirectly challenged by the majority of Thai AD programs through the years.

Initiatives that effectively targeted the main drivers of highland opium production in Thailand were backed by a strong and enduring national and international political commitment, and complemented by a crucial dedication to adequate financing. This was a decisive combination of factors that helped steadily drive Thailand's successful efforts to end opium production in the hill country.

Financing was significantly abetted by decades of tremendous growth in the Thai economy after World War II. At 12 percent growth per annum, Thailand had one of the

fastest growing economies in the world by 1989.¹²⁶ Healthy state coffers enabled the Thai government to generously augment considerable international donations and unwaveringly finance continual alternative development in the highland areas.¹²⁷

In sum, all of the major negative environmental characteristics that perpetuate drug production in illicit crop growing areas were successfully addressed in Thai AD initiatives – geographic remoteness and lack of infrastructure, armed conflict and instability, lack of state control and authority, and food insecurity and a lack of viable alternatives to growing opium as a cash crop. Though there were mistakes and misfires, a combination of well-targeted programs that worked to comprehensively mitigate the negative drivers of highland opium production was key to successful efforts in Thailand.

The campaign was bolstered by a strong national determination to end opium production in the northlands, actively promoted by key figures in Thai society, and underwritten by the rapid economic growth enjoyed by the nation after World War II. Consequently, the Thai government and international donors maintained a high level of commitment and consistent financing for AD projects through the years. The patience and sincerity to steadily endorse and adequately finance the projects over a long-term period was essential to a positive outcome in the Thai highlands.

Together, the Thai government, international developers, and NGOs designed projects and pioneered methods for the effective implementation of AD programs that have substantially influenced subsequent thinking and efforts in illicit crop control

¹²⁶ Renard, 46.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 166-167.

around the world. In many ways, the Thai model has served to define the basic concept of alternative development.¹²⁸

One of the most influential aspects of the Thai model was the participatory nature of the projects and programs. The Thai AD efforts ultimately served to validate the PRA development paradigm as ideal examples of success in the field.

Finally, in order to reduce harm and create a more effective drug control regime, many experts feel that it is sensible to only engage in the forced eradication of illicit crops as a last resort, after farmers have had ample time and opportunity to avail themselves of well-established alternative livelihoods. At the very least, the destruction of illicit crops without adequate alternatives for the farmers causes instability, increased poverty, increased food insecurity and misery.

Historically, governments have often placed the highest priority on political expediency and destroyed the crops of desperate peasants who have not had access to alternative means of livelihood. The repercussions of such ill-advised actions will be explored in some of the following case studies.

Avoiding a premature reliance on forced crop eradication in the Thai highlands allowed for the continuation of stable and enduring progress in the reduction of illicit cultivation in Thailand. The selective eradication of highland opium fields didn't begin until 1984, and then only in areas where it was concluded that inhabitants had been provided with adequate access to feasible alternatives.¹²⁹ Once again, King Bhumibol deserves some credit for advocating abstinence from forced eradication in the highlands

¹²⁸ Ibid., xv.

¹²⁹ Renard, 102.

until alternative development and crop replacement programs had been given sufficient opportunity to become established.¹³⁰

It should be acknowledged that even at its zenith, Thai opium production was always well below that of its highland neighbors, Laos and Burma. Thailand's primary importance in the ad hoc alliance was as a global trafficking outlet for regional opiate production, and home to criminal masterminds, financiers and kingpins – the logistical nerve center of the Golden Triangle.¹³¹ Thailand had the infrastructure to truck the drugs down out of the remote wilds of the Burmese and Laotian highlands, and ship them out to global consumers. Also unique to the region at the time, Thailand had a modern banking system that could accommodate the multi-million dollar drug deals.¹³²

Although their illegal opium production was significant in its prime, relatively modest output surely made illicit crop control an easier endeavor in Thailand than it could ever be in Burma, even in the best of circumstances. Be that as it may, illicit Thai production of opium was a widespread and serious problem in the country's highlands, and virtual suppression of the illegal crop in Thailand is an impressive and potentially instructive achievement.

In further discussion of countries far beyond the Golden Triangle that have tried and failed to sustain reductions in illicit crop cultivation, and in the following case study of

¹³⁰ Ibid., 116.

¹³¹ Lintner, 13.

¹³² Ibid.

Laos, we find that one or more of the factors that were essential to Thai success are missing.

Laos: Caught in the Middle

With Thailand to the west and Burma to the northwest, the Lao People's Democratic Republic is positioned as one of the three countries of the notorious Golden Triangle. As such, post-World War II opium and heroin production in Laos has been largely defined by relationships with its partners in the triad, as well as with the other former French colonies in Indochina. But while it shares some cultural characteristics and historical experiences with various neighbors on the Indochinese peninsula, Laos has also experienced distinctive events and circumstances that have shaped its patterns of opium and heroin production over the years, and contributed to specific reasons for its failure to sustain reductions in illicit crop cultivation.

Colonial subjugation is an indelible and dramatically influential experience in any nation's history. In Laos, decisions and operations undertaken by the imperial powers during and after the colonial era left a disadvantageous heritage of political conflict, war, and drug production that continues today. Across the Indochinese peninsula, the seeds of similar cultural legacies were sown long before the official appropriation of regional territory by France in the late nineteenth century.¹³³

¹³³ Nicola Cooper, *France in Indochina: Colonial Encounters* (Oxford, UK: Berg / Oxford International Publishers Ltd., 2001), 11.

Foreshadowing the French colonial period, Jesuit missionaries arrived in Tonkin (North Vietnam) in 1627, steadily followed by contingents of eager traders and explorers through the years. Members of many generations of French had already established themselves in the region by the time the boundaries of the *Union indochinoise* were formally delineated in 1887.¹³⁴

Hence, French expansion in the area had not originally been a deliberate state agenda. It had instead transpired mostly through a series of individual actions and piecemeal conquests staged by assorted French explorers and adventurers over several generations. Sometimes armed intervention was at least partially instigated by the political entanglements of Catholic missionaries. But whatever the case, as Southeast Asian territory slowly accumulated, the attendant economic and political investments of more and more Frenchmen progressively entrenched French state interests in the area over the course of more than two centuries.¹³⁵

During the Napoleonic era, as France articulated stronger economic and political aspirations for an empire that would rival that of Great Britain, more deliberate and direct state policy guided a series of military operations that culminated in the annexation of Saigon in 1862, Cambodia in 1863, and central Vietnam and Tonkin (northern Vietnam) in 1883 and 1884 respectively.¹³⁶ Laos was added in 1893, after Siam ceded the territory

¹³⁴ Ibid., 12.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 11-12.

¹³⁶ McCoy, *The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia*, 73.

to France following defeat in the Franco-Siamese War earlier that year.¹³⁷ In order to defray the expense of Southeast Asian conquest, the French quickly established an opium franchise within six months of taking Saigon.¹³⁸

The French already had a large established clientele for their opium in Vietnam. Aside from a growing number of native smokers, the many Chinese that had migrated south in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries from Kwangtung and Fukien provinces had brought a robust opium habit to Vietnam along with their valuable expertise in business and commerce.¹³⁹ Largely comprised of the Chinese merchant class, there were already large populations of opium smokers in the cities of Hanoi, Hue, and Saigon when the French arrived to take control.¹⁴⁰

Like the British, the French endeavored to maintain and exploit their colonial opium monopolies for maximum revenue potential. In the late nineteenth century, the various state monopolies across French Indochina were consolidated under the powerful *Régie de l'Opium*, and a large opium refinery was established in Saigon to process huge quantities of raw opium into readily smokable commercial products. A new mixture was manufactured that burned at a faster rate than regular opium, thereby inducing smokers to increase their consumption and buy more. In addition, cheaper opium was brought in

¹³⁷ Martin Stuart-Fox, *A History of Laos* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 24-25.

¹³⁸ McCoy, *The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia*, 73.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 72.

¹⁴⁰ Bertil Lintner, 4.

from Yunnan to market to potential users who could not afford the superior Indian imports.¹⁴¹

The opium business was brisk in French Indochina during the first few decades of the twentieth century, with thousands of opium dens and retail shops in operation. But World War II dramatically interrupted global trade relations, and the French began to have difficulty importing the lucrative commodity from the usual sources.

After France was taken by Germany, and the Japanese occupied Indochina, the French colonial bureaucracy that was allowed to continue administration became increasingly concerned with averting a fiscal crisis caused by significantly decreased opium revenue. Taxes on opium only provided about 15 percent of colonial revenue at this time, down from more than 30 percent around the turn of the century.¹⁴² Similar to conclusions reached by the Thai and the British who were also affected by wartime disruptions to opium imports, the French decided that the only recourse was to encourage greater opium production in the highlands of their Southeast Asian colonies in order to supply regional demand and increase the flow of revenue streams.

The ethnic tribes that produced opium in the highlands of French Indochina were many of the same tribes that had migrated to the hills of Thailand and Burma, namely the Lisu, Lahu, Akha, Yao, and Hmong tribes.¹⁴³ The Hmong had populated the uplands of Tonkin and Laos by the thousands in the mid-nineteenth century, fleeing an escalated

¹⁴¹ McCoy, *The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia*, 74.

¹⁴² Ibid., 74-76.

¹⁴³ Lintner, 4.

bloody persecution in Southwestern China that had started in the Manchu Dynasty some two hundred years earlier.¹⁴⁴ By the time of World War II, the Hmong had been supplementing French colonial opium stores for a long time. However, tribesmen had repeatedly resisted French demands for increased opium production and French attempts to halt the diversion of stocks via smuggling, violently attacking French garrisons and fomenting bloody revolt when provoked.¹⁴⁵

Now however, the French felt that they had no choice but to bend the Hmong to their will. The colonial authorities feared that if they failed to boost revenues through a reinvigorated opium economy, the impending financial shortfall would jeopardize the viability of their entire Southeast Asian venture. They believed that solvency hinged upon increased Hmong opium production and diminished smuggling in the Hmong regions. Therefore, with trepidation in many quarters, the desperate imperialists devised strategic approaches to deal with the contentious Hmong tribesmen in Laos and Tonkin.

In Laos, the French simply backed one powerful clan leader over another in the foremost Hmong political center, Nong Het.¹⁴⁶ The ingratiated victor, Touby Lyfoung of the Ly clan, dutifully raised the annual head tax from three to eight silver piasters. Realizing that the sum of the stiff new tax was unattainable for many Hmong, Touby

¹⁴⁴ McCoy, *The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia*, 80. Note: McCoy refers to these particular tribes in Laos and Tonkin as “Meo,” not “Hmong.” The Vietnamese “Meo” was derived from the Chinese “Miao,” and is a broad designator that was arbitrarily assigned by the Chinese to encompass a disparate collection of highland ethnic groups, including the Hmong. The Meo that McCoy is chronicling in Laos are referred to here more specifically as “Hmong,” as they are in most other topical literature. “Hmong” is also the self-referential term commonly used by this group of Laotian highlanders.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 77.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 78-80.

thoughtfully allowed that the obligation could alternatively be met with the payment of three kilograms of opium. Since the previous average per capita harvest had probably been less than a kilogram, opium production suddenly spiked across all the Hmong regions of northern Laos.¹⁴⁷

In Tonkin, by contrast, the French had long been frustrated by a lack of consolidated Hmong population centers and a dearth of tribal political organization. There simply were not any political strongmen among the Hmong groups there for the colonialists to co-opt. But the ethnic Tai that populated the lowland valleys maintained effective control over most of the markets and commerce in the region, so the French focused on an alliance with powerful White Tai and Black Tai leaders in Tonkin. This proved to be a successful strategy for the imperial power, at least in regard to achieving the task at hand. After 1940, Tai leaders were substantially rewarded by the French for coercing the Hmong to produce increased volumes of opium in the highlands of Tonkin.¹⁴⁸

The decisions and maneuvers undertaken by the French during this time in order to stimulate increased opium production in Laos and Tonkin had tremendous cultural and political repercussions in Southeast Asia over the following decades. For example, by engineering this particular solution to wartime opium shortages in Indochina, the French reinforced the fateful process that eventually transformed the highland economy in much of their jurisdiction from one based on subsistence agriculture to one based on farming opium as a cash crop.¹⁴⁹ This was an essential antecedent phenomenon that facilitated

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 83-84

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 86.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 84.

the exponentially increased opium production and heroin manufacture in the Golden Triangle in the 1960s.

French policies and tactics developed to boost opium production after the outbreak of World War II also produced ramifications that factored dramatically into both of the Indochina Wars. In Laos, the way that the colonialists had favored Touby Lyfoung over the other clan's leader, Lo Faydang, made enemies of the loser and his many clansmen. Consequently, Faydang was able to persuade many Hmong to follow him to Vietnam where they aligned with the Viet Minh against the French. Over time, he continued to successfully enlist Hmong for the Viet Minh, allegedly using the issue of Touby's onerous opium tax as a recruiting tool.¹⁵⁰

Eventually Faydang became an important leader for the Pathet Lao, and during the Second Indochina War he led thousands of communist guerilla fighters against nearly thirty thousand CIA-backed Hmong mercenaries affiliated with Touby Lyfoung.¹⁵¹ By propping up and privileging one clan leader over the leader of a rival clan, the French had amplified and deepened natural political divisions in the highland Hmong communities throughout Laos and much of Indochina. This division played out in bitterly opposed Hmong alliances during both Indochina Wars.

Colonial arrangements to secure increased postwar opium output in Tonkin proved even more pivotal to the fate of France's tenure in Southeast Asia than their activity in

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 85.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 78-85.

Laos. In 1954, as the First Indochina War dragged on, the French decided to put all their chips on a battle in the remote mountains of northwestern Tonkin. There they planned a major defeat for the Viet Minh, in the valley of Dien Bien Phu. But the surrounding mountains were populated by Hmong who despised the French for having employed the Tai to oppress them, and cheat and underpay them for their opium for so many years.

Prior to battle, thousands of these anti-French Hmong reportedly assisted the Viet Minh in establishing the best and most strategic positions on the mountain ridges around Dien Bien Phu, from which they delivered the fatal blow. Motivated by their acquired animosity for the colonialists, the Hmong of northwestern Tonkin helped the Viet Minh win perhaps the most decisive battle of the First Indochina War, driving France out of Southeast Asia.¹⁵²

Before the French denouement at Dien Bien Phu, Laos had been granted semi-autonomy in 1950, and full independence as a constitutional monarchy in October, 1953.¹⁵³ Subsequently, the government struggled for years to unify opposing political interests amidst domestic and regional upheaval.

French defeat in Indochina ushered in an era of more direct involvement for the United States government in its mission to contain communism in Southeast Asia. But along with pre-drawn lines of engagement, the US also inherited an environment that contained resilient subcultures and coveted illicit enterprises based on opium, and increasingly, on heroin production. Eventually elements of the US government would

¹⁵² Ibid., 86-87.

¹⁵³ Stuart-Fox, 59.

find it expedient to either passively allow or actively facilitate the drug trade in Laos, the Golden Triangle, and other regions of Indochina in order to further several different political and military objectives.

Bordering both communist North Vietnam and China, Laos was viewed by US government policymakers as a critical “buffer state” in the post-World War II era, safeguarding the status of Thailand and the rest of noncommunist Southeast Asia.¹⁵⁴ Likewise interested in maintaining a friendly government in South Vietnam, after 1954 American strategists began to devise policy that initiated a more forthright involvement in the former French colonies to buttress the containment of communism in Southeast Asia. In Laos, initially this meant US support for the Royal Lao Army against the Pathet Lao. But after the communists enjoyed a surprising election victory in 1958, US policymakers decided to hedge their bets.

Frightened by the left’s success, the US responded by using the CIA to finance the formation of a hardline right-wing coalition in Laos, as they curtailed all foreign aid to the neutralist administration. The swift result of the latter action was a fiscal crisis that forced Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma and his government to resign shortly thereafter, clearing the way for a new right-wing prime minister to assume power.¹⁵⁵

The atmosphere in Laos remained tumultuous through a series of coups and counter coups over the next several years, as Laos descended into full-blown civil war

¹⁵⁴ *The Most Secret Place on Earth: The CIA’s Covert War in Laos*, directed by Mark Eberle (Berlin, Germany: Gebrueder Beetz Filmproduktion, 2008), DVD.

¹⁵⁵ McCoy, *The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia*, 258-259.

around 1960.¹⁵⁶ In that same year, the CIA began to organize a clandestine anti-communist guerilla army in the Laotian hinterlands, and they identified a young Hmong Laotian Army officer named Vang Pao as the man they needed to help them do it.¹⁵⁷

CIA operatives began flying Vang Pao to a series of scattered Hmong villages in the highlands west and north of the Plain of Jars, offering rice, guns, and money for rebel recruits. And everywhere they went, they carved out some kind of a crude landing strip on the mountain hillside, linking all the remote highland enclaves under their control.¹⁵⁸ Later, in 1963-1964, the CIA and Vang Pao used this same technique to gain a foothold high in the Hmong mountain villages that were deep inside Pathet Lao territory in Sam Neua Province in northeast Laos.¹⁵⁹

By 1961 US strategists had considered Laos the main security crisis in Southeast Asia.¹⁶⁰ Thus, clandestine operations were undertaken through which the CIA funneled weapons and supplies to right-wing hardliners in Laos,¹⁶¹ and continued to train and arm tribal commando units in the hills. Meanwhile, President Kennedy publically insisted to the American people and the international community that “We seek no wider conflict in

¹⁵⁶ Eberle.

¹⁵⁷ McCoy, *The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia*, 268, 274.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 274.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 276.

¹⁶⁰ “Vietnam, A Television History: Cambodia and Laos (Part 8),” directed by Martin Smith. *American Experience*, No. 110, Public Broadcasting Service, December 2, 1997 (Original air date).

¹⁶¹ Eberle.

Laos,” only peace.¹⁶² Contrary to Kennedy’s zealous appeals, biographer and historian Thomas Reeves confirms, “In Laos Jack approved a ‘secret war’ that for years spread mayhem and death throughout the strife-torn nation.”¹⁶³

Ravaged by political chaos and civil war, Laos was eventually drawn into the Second Indochina War. The Pathet Lao’s North Vietnamese benefactors had chosen to increasingly route the majority of their southbound troops and materiel through the country over what became known as the “Ho Chi Minh Trail,”¹⁶⁴ drawing maximum US attention to Laos as a critical battleground. By 1964 the US would secretly commence a ferocious bombing campaign over Laos that would further entrap the country in the horror of the Second Indochina War, and thoroughly terrorize and destabilize the population for many years to come.

The Laotian Labyrinth: The Nexus of Opium and Conflict in Late Twentieth Century Southeast Asia

Opium traffic out of Laos had been largely controlled by Corsican syndicates since the First Indochina War in the late-1940s, when affiliates in Marseille and Saigon coordinated the smuggling of gold, currency, and narcotics between the two ports.¹⁶⁵ The

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Thomas Reeves, *A Question of Character: A Life of John F. Kennedy* (New York: The Free Press/Macmillan, Inc., 1991), 416.

¹⁶⁴ Stuart-Fox, 139.

¹⁶⁵ McCoy, *The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia*, 210.

Corsicans were quick to use the airstrips that Vang Pao and his cohorts had roughed out in the highland forests, conveniently placed for hopscotching around the opium-growing mountain villages.¹⁶⁶

But when General Ouane Rattikone emerged as one of the top leaders to survive the Laotian coups and countercoups of 1964 and 1965, he decided to eliminate Corsican competition in the drug trade by denying them the documents required to access Laotian airports. During his management of the semiofficial Laotian Opium Administration for right-wing leader General Phoumi Nosavan beginning in 1962, General Ouane had pioneered the arrangement of regular Burmese opium caravans into Laos.¹⁶⁷ Now he was eager to maximize the potential of the opium trade in Laos free from competition.

It was a case of poor timing for the General, however. By 1965 the Laotian air force was stretched to capacity with increased fighting on the Plain of Jars and heavy bombing of the Ho Chi Minh Trail in eastern Laos.¹⁶⁸ The supreme Laotian air force commander refused to allow the diversion of any aircraft for opium transport.

At the same time, many of the 30,000-some highland Hmong enlisted by Vang Pao and the CIA depended on cash from regular opium sales to the Corsicans. Ample American rice drops to these allied tribes had served to incentivize an increased dedication of labor and land to poppy cultivation and opium production in these areas.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 277.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 259-260.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 262-263.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 277, 282-283.

With little other air transport operating in much of the country, the CIA-controlled Air America airline began to collect the Hmong opium harvests, primarily throughout northeastern Laos, sometime around 1965. These transports routinely delivered their illicit cargo to Vang Pao at a secret base in Long Tieng.¹⁷⁰

The CIA is alleged to have regularly transported Hmong opium out of the Laotian hills to the base at Long Tieng on Air America transports until sometime in 1971.¹⁷¹ After the CIA and USAID gave Vang Pao financial assistance to form his own airline in 1967, the new “Xieng Khouang Air Transport” apparently flew the opium from Long Tieng to Vientiane.¹⁷²

In due course, with the assistance of an expert chemist from China, Vang Pao opened a heroin laboratory at Long Tieng in 1970. Sources claim that the lab became so profitably productive that the main direction of transport was eventually reversed, with supplemental opium regularly purchased and flown from Vientiane to Long Tieng for conversion to heroin.¹⁷³ The final destination for all Long Tieng produced heroin is not known, but it is alleged that at least part of these exports were shipped out to supply the growing addict population among American G.I.s serving in South Vietnam.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 263.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Ibid., 278.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 281.

¹⁷⁴ Chouvy, *Opium*, 97.

By comparison, in northwest Laos along the border with Burma, China, and Thailand, the character of the modern drug trade was greatly influenced by the victory of the Chinese Communists in 1949, and the subsequent activities of remaining KMT forces in the Burmese Shan States and Thailand after 1961. Shortly after the Nationalist loss in 1949, the CIA rearmed and supported the 3rd and 5th Regiments of the KMT 93rd Division as they conducted cross-border operations into China and involved themselves in opium production and traffic out of Burma. But by this time the KMT had already been involved in opium production for many years.

The production and traffic of Manchurian opium partially financed Japanese military forays into China in the 1930s, and during World War II the Japanese had financed their occupying army in Guangdong by trafficking low-grade heroin purchased from the Chinese Nationalists.¹⁷⁵ After promoting Thai annexation of the Shan States during World War II, the Japanese encouraged resident Thai Northern Army commander and acting military governor, General Phin Choonhavan, to forge mutually profitable relations with the KMT. After their defeat in 1949, the straggling holdout regiments of the KMT fled to the bountiful Shan States, where they parlayed their connections into control of the most prime opium producing areas in Southeast Asia.¹⁷⁶

After 1949, the CIA hired Shan leader U Ba Thein to train Lahu tribesmen as commandos to protect KMT and CIA border outposts inside Burma from Burmese Army

¹⁷⁵ Chouvy, *Opium*, 68.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 67-68.

patrols and government militias.¹⁷⁷ Fleeing Burma after the start of the 1958 Shan national revolution, Thein eventually settled in Muong Sing in northwest Laos.

From there, he continued to arrange CIA supply and personnel transport to and from the Burmese outposts along the Chinese border via Shan rebel opium caravans, which were a safer alternative to sending Air America flights into potentially hostile territory. Eventually, through these caravans, Thein arranged a series of arms-for-opium deals with General Ouane Rattikone, who had access to the surplus of weapons supplied to the Laotian Army by the United States.¹⁷⁸

In summary, most of the opium and heroin trade in northwest Laos involved the KMT, trained ethnic commandos in the Shan States of neighboring Burma, and elements of the Laotian military. All of these players and their drug trafficking activities were directly tied to US foreign policy positions, CIA espionage operations against China, and other anti-communist operations in Southeast Asia.

It should be noted that the Shan rebels really only controlled a small fraction of the opium trekked out of Burma at this time, with the well-entrenched KMT trafficking the lion's share of the output through their control of regional caravans. After the majority of the 93rd were routed from their turf in the Shan region by Burmese and Chinese troops in 1961, they maintained their control from just over the border across the Mekong River, first in Laos, then in Thailand.¹⁷⁹ Even after their decisive defeat in the so-called "1967 Opium War" at the hands of the relentless General Ouane, the KMT purportedly still

¹⁷⁷ McCoy, *The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia*, 308.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 306.

¹⁷⁹ Chouvy, *Opium*, 65-66.

managed to maintain control of about 90 percent of Burmese exports, with the Shan rebels controlling about 7 percent, and the Kachin rebels at 3 percent.¹⁸⁰

The scene of the famous 1967 Opium War was set when ambitious Shan warlord Chan Shee-fu launched a colossal sixteen-ton opium caravan bound for Laos, intended to fill an order placed by General Ouane Rattikone.¹⁸¹ Anxious to preserve their dominance in the trade, KMT leaders sent over a thousand troops into Burma to intercept this 300-packhorse caravan and its 500 armed escorts. But the Shan managed to get across the Mekong into Laos, where they dug in and prepared to battle their pursuers.¹⁸²

By this date, General Ouane Rattikone had the unchecked ability to employ the Laotian air force as he pleased, having conspired with other military leaders to oust the pious air force commander who had placed a higher priority on the achievement of national military objectives than on accommodation of the General's drug deals. So in 1967, after KMT and Shan forces clashed in Laos and battled for days resulting in no clear advantage for either side, General Ouane was moved to enter the fray. With little restraint, the General simply pounded the entire theater with a squadron of North American T-28s, mopping up with his Second Paratroop Battalion, who collected the sixteen tons of opium on behalf of the General, presumably gratis.¹⁸³

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 65.

¹⁸¹ McCoy, *The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia*, 295-296.

¹⁸² Ibid., 296.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

In the wake of the confrontation Chan Shee-fu never regained his former prominence, and henceforth the KMT was obliged to make some concessions to General Ouane, who emerged as one of the premier heroin manufacturers in the Golden Triangle.¹⁸⁴ The incident highlighted the extent to which various regional government and insurgent military organizations were involved with the opium trade. The episode was also notable because it involved a struggle for control over illegal Burmese drug exports between three different entities that had each been empowered by some measure of US government support.

On June 6, 1971, *The New York Times* reported what they had learned from a leaked classified CIA document concerning opium traffic in Southeast Asia. The CIA had identified twenty-one opium refineries in the tri-border area of the Golden Triangle, including seven labs that were capable of processing high-grade No. 4 heroin. Many of these refineries were located in areas controlled by US allies, including KMT forces and Yao mercenaries for the CIA. One of the major labs in Ban Houei Sai, Laos was apparently owned by General Ouane Rattikone, who allegedly also sponsored a major lab in the Vientiane region.¹⁸⁵

The facts surrounding opium production, heroin processing and drug trafficking during the Second Indochina War are not entirely clear. Likewise, the extent of CIA and US government involvement in the drug trade during this time has been difficult to ascertain. However, the fundamentals of the situation are evident. The basic history that

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 248.

is widely accepted if not beyond dispute in some quarters, is that the CIA helped promote the opium trade in northeastern Laos and the surrounding area in order to support allied Hmong guerilla commandos in the northeastern highlands.

Similarly, multiple sources corroborate US facilitation of opium traffic in the Golden Triangle region of northwest Laos stemming from longstanding CIA involvement with regiments of the 93rd Division of the KMT and Shan tribal mercenaries who assisted US espionage activities focused on Red China. US support for regular Burmese opium caravans entering Laos was also tacitly acquired through US support for the Royal Laotian Army, which at that time was the only foreign army in the world entirely financed by the US government.¹⁸⁶

Correspondingly, as a right-wing stalwart and former commander in chief of the Laotian Army, General Ouane Rattikone enjoyed extraordinary latitude in the behavior that was tolerated by the CIA and the US government, who were principally concerned with maintaining allied support against the North Vietnamese and the Pathet Lao. The same can be said for Vang Pao, who apparently ran a brisk heroin manufacturing and trafficking network with a large degree of US complicity.

General Ouane and Vang Pao can be seen in this light as positioned in a long line of unsavory bedfellows that the US indulged as partners in the preeminent worldwide fight against Communism. The downside repercussions from such indulgence were, *inter alia*, a further entrenchment of opium and heroin production in Southeast Asia and the continued growth and development of worldwide illegal drug distribution networks.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

The importance of understanding this history is not simply to place blame for US government involvement in the opium and heroin trade in Southeast Asia. Rather, tracing the pertinent specifics of US political and military engagement in Laos after World War II, and in Southeast Asia after the Chinese Communist victory in 1949 and the French defeat in the First Indochina War, informs an understanding of the evolution and depth of opium and heroin trafficking in Laos and the rest of the Golden Triangle.

In studying this period when several regional and international entities were desperately vying for power and influence in Southeast Asia, there emerges a portrait of Laos as a country that was becoming very deeply involved in the drug trade through the energetic commitment of many different vested interests.

As is often the case in illicit crop producing areas around the world, various government and rebel forces in Laos and the border regions found it irresistible to engage in opium and heroin trafficking in the post-World War II period. Sometimes their involvement appears to have been primarily motivated by a desire to further military operations and political objectives, at least at first. During the Second Indochina War however, aside from the expedient purchases of Hmong opium to maintain commando allegiance, it seems evident that illicit drug traffic by military entities of every stripe in Laos was most often motivated by bald-faced greed and desire for personal enrichment.

Research has shown that even when armed forces begin as relatively uncorrupted and ideologically motivated, whether they are rebels or government-affiliated troops, once they begin to self-finance through criminal enterprise they often steadily gravitate toward prioritizing criminal operations and wealth accumulation over military and political

objectives.¹⁸⁷ This pattern of behavior has been documented in the conflict areas of major drug-producing regions from Southwest and Southeast Asia to South America.

Economist and author Paul Collier and his colleagues at the World Bank have written about this dynamic:

Most entrepreneurs of violence have essentially political objectives, and presumably initially undertake criminal activities only as a grim necessity to raise finance. However, over time the daily tasks involved in running a criminal business may tend inadvertently to develop a momentum of their own. The organization attracts more criminal types and fewer idealists, so that it may gradually change its character. Some rebel leaderships tend to do well out of war and may be quite reluctant to see it end.¹⁸⁸

This kind of gradual corruption of purpose appears to have occurred during the Indochina Wars with respect to forces aligned with the US, and it has been exhibited subsequently by various insurgent groups and their involvement in Laotian opium and heroin production since 1975.

Around the world and throughout history, soldiers involved in wars of insurgency and drug traffickers have operated hand in hand. Symbiotic relationships presumably evolve because both groups must operate outside the law and develop clandestine networks of support. Today, observers have witnessed transnational criminal networks increasingly

¹⁸⁷ Cornell, "Narcotics and Armed Conflict: Interaction and Implications." See also, Felbab-Brown, "Shooting Up: The Drug Trade and Military Conflict."

¹⁸⁸ World Bank, *Breaking the Conflict Trap: Civil War and Development Policy*, World Bank Policy Research Report, by Paul Collier, V. L. Elliott, Havard Hegre, Anke Hoeffler, Marta Reynal-Querol, and Nicholas Sambanis. (World Bank/Oxford University Press, 2003), 79.

cooperating with localized insurgents, and collaborating with international terrorists as well.¹⁸⁹

Similar to the activities of the KMT in the Golden Triangle, insurgent drug trafficking may be combined with espionage-related ventures or reconnaissance operations. Consequently, it eventually becomes very difficult for an observer to identify individual actors or groups as primarily either politically or criminally motivated.

Such conflation of purpose is tragic. Because illegal drugs and contraband yield such high profit margins (especially when stolen or garnered at bargain prices through coercion), many involved officers and troops enjoy the bounty that the chaos of war provides and may act to protect their business interests by attempting to prevent or subvert any peaceful resolution to the conflict.

In reviewing the history of Laos, over the roughly one hundred year period from their beginning as a colony in French Indochina to the victory of the Pathet Lao in 1975, we can trace the process in which opium production is consistently sponsored and expanded, at times even coerced, by a wide variety of entities. From the earlier exploitation of colonial monopolies and generations of traveling merchant caravans, to the airborne representatives of assorted state governments and criminal syndicates in the twentieth century, the Hmong and other tribes were encouraged at every turn to produce as much opium as they possibly could.

¹⁸⁹ Michael Miklaucic and Jacqueline Brewer, Editors, *Convergence: Illicit Networks and National Security in the Age of Globalization*, Center for Complex Operations/Institute for National Strategic Studies (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 2013). Accessed 9-29-14, <http://www.defenceiq.com/PDFS/convergence.pdf>.

The experience of Laos as a premier Cold War staging area and battleground for foreign-backed coups, proxy warfare, multiple insurgencies, variously-aligned commando mercenaries, and massive bombing raids thoroughly shattered Laotian society and created a wild and lawless environment that attracted a wide assortment of outlaw entrepreneurs and audacious government officials eager to procure opium, manufacture heroin, and pipeline it through the country. Laos suffered from an overabundance of crooked politicians and military officers, malign international businessmen, and self-interested foreign agents. By the second half of the twentieth century many different powerful groups and individuals were developing vital interests in the opium and heroin economies of Laos and the Golden Triangle, and they worked hard to enable and expand their related enterprises.

Throughout the following decades, the methods of commercial opium farming, harvesting, processing, scheduling, equipment and product purchasing, warehousing, criminal networking, communications, banking and accounting, money laundering and investment, corruption and bribery, and illicit transport and trafficking became very deeply ingrained in much of Laotian society. Tragically, the degree of societal involvement and the magnitude of systemic corruption and criminal behavior manifested by Laotian government and military involvement in the drug trade during the Indochina Wars promotes a severely dysfunctional society and corrupt institutional legacy that is very difficult to mitigate, much less terminate.¹⁹⁰

¹⁹⁰In fact, much of the Laotian government and military corruption specifically identified here was routed wholesale from the seat of power, if not rendered inactive, when the Pathet Lao finally overran Vientiane in 1975. However, much damage had been wrought by this time, and opium production practices, illicit networks, and trafficking

In summary, the entrenchment of the illegal drug industry in late twentieth century Laos was made feasible by an unstable and lawless environment punctuated by insurgency, war, and a devastating US bombing campaign that secretly dropped the equivalent of a planeload of bombs every eight minutes, 24-hours a day, for nine straight years, from 1964-1973.¹⁹¹ In addition, the state was highly corrupt and maintained very weak authority in the hinterlands and many border areas. Finally, the ethnic hill tribes in Laos that had some historic tradition of opium culture suffered from food insecurity and lived in remote and undeveloped wilderness areas where there was often little recourse to opium cultivation for their livelihood.

Conditions similar to these are apparent in most every case of illicit crop producing nation, from the Golden Triangle, to the Golden Crescent, to the Andean Nations of South America. These defining attributes continue to affect Laos today and have enabled the return and steady rise of opium production in the country.

infrastructure had become well established. By the late eighties, the communists were collecting substantial state revenue from the drug trade in Laos (Tullis, 77).

¹⁹¹ "Secret War in Laos," *Legacies of War*. Accessed 9-19-14, <http://legaciesofwar.org/about-laos/secret-war-laos/>. Note: Author Alfred W. McCoy maintains that Laos is the most heavily bombed country in the history of warfare, receiving over two million tons of ordnance delivered over the course of approximately 580,000 bombing missions.

Under the Pathet Lao

In 1975, the government in Vientiane finally fell to communist Pathet Lao forces. Since that time they have been a very secretive and insular government, exhibiting behavior typical of many one-party totalitarian states. “Opaque” is a word that has often been used to describe Laotian government policy and operations. Consequently, some of the specifics underlying recent spikes in opium production remain uncertain, but an examination of the facts that are known is telling enough.

The communist government has not made much progress in problem areas linked to illicit crop production since 1975, allowing for the recent resurgence of opium production in the country. Laos is still one of the most undeveloped and poorest nations in the world, with subsistence agriculture constituting around 80 percent of the country’s employment. This reality, coupled with the fact that only about 5 percent of the land in Laos is arable, presents the portrait of a country where vast segments of the population perpetually teeter on the edge of food insecurity and food scarcity.¹⁹²

Many Laotian hill tribe communities continue to suffer from food scarcity, exacerbated by decades of intermittent insurgent activity and hostile military incursions in the far-flung northern highlands.¹⁹³ The arrival of 30,000 North Vietnamese troops in Laos in 1977, at the behest of Vientiane, caused widespread alarm and fueled a variety of

¹⁹² “Laos Profile,” *BBC News*, May 22, 2014. Accessed 9-29-14, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-pacific-15351898>.

¹⁹³ Tullis, 79, 111.

foreign-backed insurgent groups in the country. The event also sparked Hmong resistance in the central highland region.

Again, all of the Laotian societal conditions detailed above are commonly associated with illicit crop cultivation. These characteristics include poverty, food insecurity, underdevelopment, insurgency and armed conflict.

Catalyzing resurgent opium production across the region, the skyrocketing Chinese economy has afforded countless scores of newly prospering Chinese the capacity to indulge in a variety of vices and contraband, including opium and heroin. Big production increases in Laos and Myanmar in recent years are largely attributed to dramatically increased Chinese demand, with virtually the entire Southeast Asian opium crop exported to satisfy the Chinese heroin boom.¹⁹⁴ With large numbers of hungry people in rural areas of Laos living on less than \$1.25 per day, opportunity costs for resuming illicit crop production to feed Chinese demand appear very low. In fact, it probably seems like a blessed opportunity in light of their dismal predicament.

Over the last decade, many observers predicted that unless more opium farmers were given viable alternatives in Southeast Asia, a return to illicit crop cultivation was likely.

¹⁹⁴ Sam Holmes, "Opium Rebounds on China Demand," *Wall Street Journal*, Nov. 1, 2012. Accessed 9-23-14, <http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052970204707104578090614285930862>. Note: Some observers believe that except for relatively negligible amounts to domestic consumers, not only are the entire harvests of Laos and Myanmar processed and exported to China, but probably also some supplemental amount from Afghanistan as well.

In a 2007 New York Times article, author and opium expert Bernard Chouvy drew an unfavorable comparison between the aggressive forced eradications in Laos and Myanmar that were unaccompanied with sufficient alternatives for affected farmers, and the measured elimination of poppy production in Thailand over a thirty-year period. Chouvy noted that the Thai effort involved careful crop substitution and all-encompassing AD programs in the highland areas, along with infrastructure development projects and education and health initiatives.¹⁹⁵

Antonio Maria Costa, Executive Director of UNODC, had a similar sense of foreboding in 2006, indicating that the Laotian government was in dire need of sustained support in the effort to assist large numbers of struggling farmers who had been forced to abandon opium cultivation.¹⁹⁶

But no support was forthcoming, and today many thousands of Laotians continue to reside in remote and undeveloped areas where there are no roads, several days journey from civilization. Unlike in Thailand, these tribes have not been the beneficiaries of any transportation infrastructure or alternative development, and consequently they have few viable alternatives to producing opium. The lack of roads negates the viability of farming alternative commercial crops to sell in lowland markets, and also makes the risk of random government patrols looking for poppy fields virtually nil.

Opium is the one crop that will pull buyers in, over hundreds of miles of rugged terrain, right to their little village. Many of these far off hamlets are also relatively close

¹⁹⁵ Thomas Fuller, "No Blowing Smoke: Poppies Fade in Southeast Asia," *New York Times*, Sept. 16, 2007. Accessed 9-23-14, http://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/16/weekinreview/16fuller.html?_r=0.

¹⁹⁶ UN Office on Drugs and Crime, "*Opium Poppy Cultivation in the Golden Triangle. Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand*," October 2006.

to the Mekong River, which is convenient for buyers to traffic the opium up to Myanmar or Yunnan for processing.¹⁹⁷

In order to analyze the causes of failed drug control in Laos, it is necessary to examine a few of the specific policies and actions that the Pathet Lao government has employed regarding opium suppression, remote ethnic populations, and rural development.

As opium production reached peak levels at the end of the eighties, international pressure on the government in Vientiane became more intense. The Laotians were apparently amenable to reduction strategies, but rightly stressed that development should be a necessary prerequisite for opium eradication. In the end, unrelenting pressure from the US and the UN finally pushed the Laotian government into a specific illicit crop reduction plan with a set timetable.¹⁹⁸

Despite adoption of a UNDCP “Masterplan” for relatively rapid reduction of opium cultivation over the 1994-2000 period, dissatisfied UNDCP officials pressed the Laotian government to act even more aggressively to eradicate illicit crops and drive down the annual harvest statistics for the country. High officials at the UNDCP offered \$80

¹⁹⁷ David Eimer, “It’s Happy Hour for the Heroin Traffickers of the Golden Triangle,” *South China Morning Post*, Sept. 26, 2013. Note: There are three main trafficking routes out of central Laos: one to the northern border with Myanmar, one to the border with Yunnan Province, and one to the Mekong (Tullis, 78). Traffickers are purported to prefer speedboat traffic on the scarcely patrolled Mekong to slowly bouncing along over inland routes.

¹⁹⁸ Paul T. Cohen, “The post-opium scenario and rubber in northern Laos: Alternative Western and Chinese models of development,” *International Journal of Drug Policy*, Vol.20, No. 5 (2009): 425.

million in assistance if the Laotian government would comply and ramp up enforcement efforts.¹⁹⁹

Sufficiently incentivized, starting in 2002 government officials spent months scouring the Laotian highlands. They went village by village, ordering the destruction of poppy fields, collecting stockpiled seeds, and levying fines for noncompliance. The campaign achieved its immediate goal and opium yields soon plummeted. By 2007 Laotian opium production had shrunk to only 1,500 hectares (9 tonnes), down from peak yields in 1989 estimated at 42,130 hectares (380 tonnes).²⁰⁰

Diligent Laotian eradication did result in much-ballyhooed short-term reductions of illicit crop cultivation, but without adequate AD it also exacerbated some fundamental drivers of drug production, namely poverty and food insecurity. It also served to further delegitimize and weaken the government's writ in affected areas.

In the end, the \$80 million that the UN had promised for AD in Laos never materialized, and the government was left without the means to effectively mitigate the societal damage caused by the aggressive eradication that they had been persuaded to undertake.²⁰¹ The funding that was actually allocated during this period was a grim mockery of former grandiose pledges. In 2005, the North Phongsaly Alternative

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Chouvy, *Opium*, 154-156. Note: Unfortunately, the period of intensive Lao crop eradication coincided with the notorious tenure of UNDCP Executive Director Pino Arlacchi, who later resigned in disgrace. In 1999 Arlacchi had promised the Laotian government about \$80 million in assistance if they would accelerate efforts to suppress opium production. Chouvy points out that this was a truly outlandish pledge, as the UNDCP only had about \$38 million available that year to divide among all of its field operations worldwide.

Development Project received a mere \$29,600 to implement programs in 33 villages.²⁰² Across Laos, only about 5 percent of families dependent on the cultivation of opium received any AD assistance whatsoever.²⁰³

Consistent lack of international attention and adequate financial support for alternative development and rural assistance in Laos fundamentally undercut all contemporary efforts to eradicate or otherwise reduce opium cultivation. Unfortunately, subsequent policies undertaken by the Laotian government only served to amplify the damage to highland communities and increase the likelihood of resurgent opium production.

One such policy employed by the government of Laos in recent years has been the forced relocation of tens of thousands of upland Hmong, Akha, and other peoples to more accessible lowland areas. The purpose of this scheme was to eliminate opium production and environmental degradation from traditional swidden agriculture in the highlands, and connect those people to existing infrastructure and potentially beneficial resources. Ultimately, the government wanted to prompt tribal transition from slash-and-burn agricultural practice to the raising of cash crops.

The result has been disastrous in a variety of ways, with countless thousands displaced and dislocated from family, culture, and livelihoods. Disoriented and impoverished transplants have rarely had the knowledge or resources required to obtain sufficient inputs for farming cash crops. At the same time, the government ban on traditional

²⁰² Chouvy, *Opium*, 185.

²⁰³ Ibid.

swiddening agriculture has added to heightened levels of food scarcity in rural areas and rendered these populations more desperate and vulnerable than ever before.²⁰⁴

As Vientiane has attempted to incorporate capitalism in the mode of China under Deng Xiaopeng in recent decades, the adoption of policies designed to attract major foreign investment have surely further precipitated a return to higher levels of illicit crop production in the country.

Despite an economy that has had a sustained annual growth of 7-8 percent for many years,²⁰⁵ poverty and corruption remain rampant in Laos. In fact, there is evidence that such impressive growth has come through the attraction of substantial foreign investment with enormous government grants of land concessions for hydropower, mining, forestry, and plantations. This has apparently further destabilized rural populations in many areas, endangering water quality and limiting peasant land use for agriculture and other sustenance.

There has also been forced resettlement of villages from particular areas to make way for large-scale resource development such as hydroelectric dam projects.²⁰⁶ These trends have served to further limit the availability of alternatives to opium cultivation as a

²⁰⁴ Ernesto Cavallo, Shannon Lawrence, and Aviva Imhoff, "Poverty Reduction in Laos: An Alternative Approach," *Power Surge: The impacts of rapid dam development in Laos* (International Rivers: Berkley, CA, 2008): 19-20. Accessed 9-23-14, Accessed 9-23-14, http://www.internationalrivers.org/files/attached-files/poverty_reduction_in_laos.pdf.

²⁰⁵ Central Intelligence Agency, "East & Southeast Asia: Laos," CIA World Factbook. Accessed 9-23-14. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/la.html>.

²⁰⁶ Cavallo, et al, 19.

survival strategy for growing numbers of destabilized and disenfranchised people in the Laotian highlands.

In summary, since 1975 the misguided Laotian government has made a series of decisions that have driven their troubled country into the ground. These policies include forced labor in reeducation camps, mandatory “collectivization” of agriculture, and involuntary relocation of tens of thousands of upland villagers. Their policies have driven away most of the educated professional and business classes and kept the country undeveloped and impoverished for decades.

More recently it seems that the regime in Vientiane is attracting big foreign investment dollars and massive natural resource development projects by giving away huge chunks of land to facilitate rapid economic growth. Unfortunately, there is little sign that the masses or impoverished rural populations of the country are deriving much benefit from this kind of economic development. To the contrary, accounts indicate that these policies are furthering the process of tribal disenfranchisement in the highlands and may be influencing a resumption of opium cultivation.

Although the quantities of opium that are currently being produced in Laos are dwarfed by Afghan output, and far below Myanmar, production has jumped several fold in recent years. In 2011, the UNODC reported that opium cultivation increased by almost 60 percent from the previous year.²⁰⁷ In only two years, from 2009 to 2011,

²⁰⁷ UN Office on Drugs and Crime, *World Drug Report 2011*, 58. Accessed 9-29-14, http://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/WDR2011/World_Drug_Report_2011_ebook.pdf.

cultivation had leapt from 1,900 to 4,100 Hectares.²⁰⁸ Then it spiked again in 2012 by 66 percent to 6,800 Hectares.²⁰⁹ Sources indicate that as many as 38,400 households in Laos cultivated poppy fields in 2012, up from as many as 20,000 in 2011²¹⁰.

In addition, while increased regional demand continues to drive up opium production, recent improvements to regional communication and transportation infrastructures have helped enable more efficient and effective drug trafficking operations in Southeast Asia.²¹¹

The case of Laos is important not because of the quantity of drugs that they produce, but because after several years of near total suppression reductions could not be sustained. The case of failed Laotian drug control efforts is an instructive contrast to enduring Thai success in illicit crop reduction. Underlying the outcomes in both countries are specific environmental factors, policy decisions, ramifications of policy sequencing and implementation, and availability of funding for anti-drug programs and policies. As we shift our attention across the ocean to South America and the illicit

²⁰⁸ UN Office on Drugs and Crime, *World Drug Report 2012*, 28. Accessed 9-29-14, http://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/WDR2012/WDR_2012_web_small.pdf.

²⁰⁹ UN Office on Drugs and Crime, *Southeast Asia Opium Survey 2012: Lao PDR, Myanmar*, 21. Accessed 9-29-14, http://www.unodc.org/documents/crop-monitoring/sea/SouthEastAsia_Report_2012_low.pdf.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 23-24. Note: These are the upper level estimates. Lower level estimates still project a major increase for the year, from as few as 8,300 households in 2011 to 10,200 households in 2012.

²¹¹ “United Nations says opium production in South East Asia's 'Golden Triangle' up 22 per cent,” *Australian Broadcasting Corporation*, December 18, 2013. Accessed 9-29-14, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-12-18/an-opium-production/5163102>.

production of coca and cocaine, we will see a mix of many similar underlying societal conditions, drug supply control policies, and related outcomes.

Chapter 3. Coca Cultivation and Cocaine Production in the Andean Region

The history of illicit crop cultivation and drug production in South America features striking similarities to the history of cultivation and production in Southeast Asia as described above. Similar to opium production in the highlands of the Golden Triangle, coca and cocaine production in the Andes mountain region of South America has also shifted back and forth between a trio of nations. Similar to Southeast Asia, illicit crop cultivation in Bolivia and Peru has deep roots in centuries-old traditions among persecuted and impoverished ethnic minorities. And like opium and heroin, illicit coca and cocaine production has also been facilitated by war and insurgency. In turn, the drug trade has financially supported lingering armed conflict and chaos in several Latin American states that have been incapable of maintaining authority over huge swaths of undeveloped backcountry within their borders.²¹²

²¹² Though not studied here in depth, some of the best examples of “narco-insurgency” in the Golden Triangle are in Myanmar, where for decades dozens of various rebel groups have financed their activities through opium and heroin production and drug trafficking. Increasingly in recent years, these same groups have been cranking out truly massive quantities of amphetamine pills, triggering an epidemic of amphetamine addiction across virtually all of Southeast Asia.

Examples of the drug trade financing armed groups, rebel and state-affiliated, in Central and South America are numerous and have affected many countries in the region including Costa Rica, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Peru among others. Both sides in the long civil conflict in Colombia are notorious for their large-scale drug trafficking activities.

Finally, as in Southeast Asia, various governments, including the US, have been implicated in advancing military and political agendas by exploiting the cocaine trade in Latin America. But also reminiscent of the heroin business in Southeast Asia, most of the officials and politicians that have been associated with the cocaine trade in the West have appeared to be motivated simply by unchecked mercenary greed.

Studying the history and factors surrounding coca and the cocaine trade in South America is a bit like gazing into a kind of strange parallel universe where much of the portrait appears as a twisted reflection of familiar characteristics and contingencies witnessed in Southeast Asia. But this harsh alternate image of latter-day cocaine production in the West appears somewhat more frantic – indeed, wired – than its Eastern antecedent, and ever more violent in every way.

The nation of Peru in South America is the ancestral homeland of the coca plant, where indigenous populations have chewed the fresh leaves for centuries, even before the Incan empire.²¹³ The leaves' stimulative properties help peasants in the mountains to weather the cold temperatures and endure long hours of hard physical labor.

Cocaine, a concentrated derivative of coca, was first synthesized in Germany in 1855, but only received widespread attention after Dr. Karl Köller's discovery of the drug as an effective local anesthetic in 1884. Interest spread rapidly and within a year cocaine was

²¹³ Paul Gootenberg, "Reluctance or Resistance? Constructing Cocaine (Prohibitions) in Peru, 1910-1950," in *Cocaine: Global Histories*, ed. Paul Gootenberg (New York, NY: Routledge, 1999), 46.

being used extensively for a variety of medical therapies across the United States and Europe.²¹⁴

In addition to coca and cocaine use by physicians, coca extracts and cocaine were added to an endless variety of tonics, remedies, and cure-alls that were very popular on both sides of the Atlantic in the late nineteenth century. In the US, the legal supply of cocaine jumped approximately 700 percent between 1890 and 1902.²¹⁵

Peruvian businessmen and industrialists came alive with a jolt to meet the opportunity that had suddenly presented itself. Though some coca was grown in other disparate locales such as Taiwan, Okinawa, Nigeria, and Java, by 1900 the majority of the coca legally grown for the world market was grown in Peru. Not only that, but from 1900 to 1905 Peru was also manufacturing more cocaine than any other nation.²¹⁶

But as increasing numbers of people consumed more and more products laced with cocaine, a backlash reform movement gathered momentum. Even before the turn of the century, many in the medical community were discussing the adverse effects of “cocainism” and pushing for tighter regulation of the drug.²¹⁷ Most US manufacturers of popular patent medicines were eventually swayed by bad press and burgeoning reformist

²¹⁴ Joseph F. Spillane, “Making a Modern Drug: The Manufacture, Sale, and Control of Cocaine in the United States, 1880-1920,” in *Cocaine: Global Histories*, ed. Paul Gootenberg (New York, NY: Routledge, 1999), 22.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 21.

²¹⁶ Gootenberg, “Reluctance or Resistance? Constructing Cocaine (Prohibitions) in Peru, 1910-1950,” 47.

²¹⁷ Marcel de Kort, “Doctors, Diplomats, and Businessmen: Conflicting Interests in the Netherlands and Dutch East Indies, 1860-1950,” in *Cocaine: Global Histories*, ed. Paul Gootenberg (New York, NY: Routledge, 1999), 125.

sentiment and eliminated coca and cocaine from their recipes even before passage of the Harrison Narcotics Act of 1914.²¹⁸ Tighter commercial regulation of cocaine in the United Kingdom followed with the Dangerous Drugs Act of 1920.

Even though these laws more closely regulated the use and sale of coca and cocaine in a reckless commercial market that had been a hazardous free-for-all, they focused primarily on retailers, not manufacturers. With proper labeling, some in the US were allowed continue the manufacture of over-the-counter products containing cocaine well into the 1920s.²¹⁹

Various international drug control treaties regulating coca and cocaine were subsequently adopted by the League of Nations prior to World War II, including the Paris Convention of 1931. Before the war the United States had pressured Peru for more regulation and restrictions regarding their coca and cocaine production, and after the war the Peruvian government soon acquiesced to dominant US and UN demands and began actively participating in international anti-drug conferences.

The contemporary cocaine industry in South America got its kick-start with the boom of recreational drug use in the US in the 1960s, albeit in a circuitous fashion. Widespread

²¹⁸ Spillane, 22.

²¹⁹ Some manufacturers that had limited product lines with a high cocaine content, such as “catarrh cure” powders for asthma, resisted regulation. They continued to sell their cocaine-based products well into the 1920s, with a core customer base that was probably quite inured to any legally mandated warning labels. For just one example, the manufacturer of “Tucker’s Asthma Specific” was found by the Bureau of Narcotics to use just as much cocaine in production in 1926 as fifteen years prior (Spillane, 40).

pot smoking among sixties' youth in the US created a huge and enduring demand for marijuana. By the 1970s US demand was mainly supplied by Mexican producers,²²⁰ until authorities let the hammer drop in Mexico in 1976 with Operation Condor.²²¹ The joint US-Mexican operation was an unprecedented offensive against Mexican drug producers, and a way for the Mexican government to acquire large fleets of US helicopters and aircraft, as well as financial aid. The Mexican government soon used the writ of Operation Condor and their new stockpiles of American weaponry to hunt down suspected leftists that had formed an armed guerilla movement in the country after the 1968 massacre in Tlatelolco Plaza in Mexico City.²²²

Aside from this “dirty war” that the operation facilitated, and the predictable finale of cloudy corruption and resumed drug traffic, Operation Condor is perhaps best remembered for suddenly shifting the US marijuana market in a radical way by thrusting the trade name for a commercial herbicide into the minds of millions of Americans – “Paraquat.”²²³

²²⁰ Thoumi refers to an author, Hernando Ruiz-Hernández, who contends that in the late 60s American traffickers went looking for new marijuana sources. After arriving in Colombia, he says they distributed seeds and booklets to locals who were eager to start up marijuana production for export to the US, returning later to purchase and ship the crops (Thoumi, *Innocent Bystanders*, 211).

²²¹ Ioan Grillo, *El Narco: Inside Mexico's Criminal Insurgency* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Press, 2011), 48-49. Note: This operation is not to be confused with the notoriously murderous *Operation Condor* carried out by right-wing juntas in the greater Southern Cone area of South America with CIA backing starting in 1975, although like that operation, the Mexicans eventually used the opportunity to hunt down suspected leftists and government opponents.

²²² *Ibid.*, 50-51.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 49.

The Mexicans had killed miles and miles of marijuana crops with Monsanto's Paraquat, but after some of the tainted marijuana was detected in American markets, panic appeared to seize the nation and no one wanted to buy pot from Mexico. The Colombians quickly ramped up their marijuana production to pick up the slack, supplanting "Acapulco Gold" with "Colombian Gold."²²⁴ The Colombian marijuana industry thrived as they became the main Latin American producers for the sizable US market from 1976 to 1979.²²⁵

The Colombians continued to enjoy a large and profitable share of the market until the more potent seedless *sin semilla* variety became the favorite of consumers in the late 1970s and 1980s, and major Mexican production resumed in 1989.²²⁶ But by then, with their profits from marijuana lagging, the Colombians had already diversified their ventures based on the assets at hand -- well-developed distribution networks, a growing diaspora in the US, large regions with weak state presence and negligible law enforcement, and a geographical comparative advantage for cocaine production right there in the Andes. In hindsight, the rise of the Colombian cartels seems inevitable.

²²⁴ Ibid., 49-50. Native Mary Roldán writes that the early Colombian traffickers of marijuana in the 1960s were the established *contrabandistas* in Medellín, the county's premier exporter of coffee and gold. The Medellín-based smugglers already had a long history of contraband trade in whisky, cigarettes, and other luxury goods when the marijuana boom hit in the late sixties (Mary Roldán, "Colombia: Cocaine and the 'Miracle' of Modernity in Medellín," in *Cocaine: Global Histories*, ed. Paul Gootenberg (New York, NY: Routledge, 1999), 166-167).

²²⁵ Ricardo Vargas, "The Anti-Drug Policy, Aerial Spraying of Illicit Crops and Their Social, Environmental and Political Impacts in Colombia," *Journal of Drug Issues*, Winter 2002, Vol. 32 (1): 11.

²²⁶ Ibid.

Whether or not marijuana is a “gateway drug” that often leads to hardcore drug abuse has been a hotly debated subject in recent years, but marijuana as a gateway drug for the dramatic rise of the Colombian cocaine cartels is beyond dispute. Success in the marijuana business had motivated the Colombians to consider getting involved in the cocaine trade years earlier. Pound for pound, cocaine was much more profitable than pot.

By the late seventies, the Colombians had successfully seized the US cocaine business from the Cubans who had controlled it for decades. At this time there was a large population of Colombian immigrants that had recently arrived in the United States, which facilitated the rapid construction of new Colombian cocaine distribution networks in the US.²²⁷

Through the late seventies and eighties Colombian cocaine producers quickly expanded their enterprise to keep pace with explosive US consumer demand. The sensational commercial success of cocaine allowed Colombian traffickers and dealers to add a much larger markup than on other drugs, reaping unprecedented profits that made some of them the first billionaire drug lords.²²⁸

During these decades nearly all of the coca was grown in Peru and Bolivia, though most of it was shipped out to Colombia for processing and export as cocaine.²²⁹ In 1985,

²²⁷ Thoumi, 211. Note: Thoumi points out the significance of a large US immigrant population from Antioquia, the Colombia Department that features Medellín as its capital (Thoumi, *Innocent Bystanders*, Note #16, 245).

²²⁸ Ibid., 59-60. Note: At one point *Forbes* magazine estimated Pablo Escobar’s worth at \$9 billion, making him the wealthiest criminal of all times (Grillo, 60).

²²⁹ Tullis, 42.

for example, only 10 percent or less of the total volume of coca leaf used for cocaine production originated in Colombia.²³⁰ However, a series of robust military operations in Peru and Bolivia in the 1980s and 1990s eventually pushed the majority of coca production to Colombia by the mid-1990s in a classic display of the balloon effect.²³¹

After cocaine set the field aflame across the United States in the late 1970s, and crack cocaine hysteria seized the spotlight in the 1980s, Richard Nixon's "War on Drugs" was polished up and recast as Reagan's "War on Drugs." The new drug warriors in Washington abandoned the outdated fixation on heroin from the East and refocused their sights southward on cocaine. In the fashion of Operation Condor in Mexico, the drug eradication effort soon became highly militarized in South America, as the drug war there was moved from the realm of diplomatic pressure and heated rhetoric to a theater of bullets and blood.

Unfortunately, for many years these costly and controversial US-sponsored forced eradication efforts were not accompanied by commensurate alternative development initiatives or adequate funding for rural development, leaving many of the primary drivers for illicit crop production in place. As we have seen in Indochina, sustained reductions of illicit crop cultivation cannot be achieved by large-scale forced eradication and interdiction operations alone.

²³⁰ Bagley, 102.

²³¹ Ibid. Note: These include "Operation Blast Furnace" in the Chapare region of Bolivia after 1986, "Plan Dignidad" from 1998 to 2002 in Bolivia, and an aggressive CIA-backed no-fly/shoot down-policy in the coca-growing regions of Peru under Alberto Fujimori (Bagley, 102). The Air Bridge Denial Program (ABD) in Peru ended abruptly in 2001 after the Peruvians accidentally shot down a Cessna carrying a US missionary family, killing two.

Among other things, an attendant comprehensive program of rural development that improves the lives of poor farmers in remote areas and provides them with viable alternatives to growing illegal cash crops must be implemented in order to sustain suppressed levels of illegal crops achieved through eradication. No matter how large and aggressive eradication operations may be, without such AD programs forced eradication will result in reduced hectareage under illicit cultivation that is like a cancer in a state of only temporary remission. It is a battle victory squandered if it is not accompanied by a wise and compassionate overall strategy for winning the war.

Meanwhile, in the wake of forceful militarized eradication and interdiction in Bolivia and Peru, Colombia assumed the dubious mantle of primary producer in South America with an estimated 90 percent of the overall coca production by 2000.²³²

Colombia: Volatility and Violence

The nation of Colombia has a historical profile that is unique to South America in different ways. Plainly stated, the unfortunate aspects of its national character that relate to illicit crop and drug production involve traits considered conducive to national disunity, lesser levels of social capital, violence, and crime.

Colombia was a hodgepodge collection of quasi-autonomous and mutually belligerent cheifdoms when the Spanish arrived in the early sixteenth century. Unlike the

²³² Bagley, 102.

governments of Guatemala, Mexico, Ecuador, Bolivia, Peru and others in the region, Colombians were not unified under a central government at the time of conquest and remained disjointed under Spanish rule.²³³ These national origins have apparently left a thorny legacy to the Colombian collective.

Different national regions in Colombia tended to develop autonomously and in relative self-sufficiency.²³⁴ Colombian scholar Francisco Thoumi has written that in Colombia, “Regional heterogeneity has resulted in cultural diversity. Area loyalties are strong, and the conformation of a national identity has been slow and incomplete.”²³⁵

In Colombia such low levels of national identification and social cohesion have translated into violent regionalism and a general lack of regard for the legitimacy of state authority. This condition has proved a disastrous liability for the Colombian state and tragic for Colombian society, with expansive regions of the country that lay beyond effective government control. In recent decades the result has been chaos and violence in remote areas hosting bands of armed insurgents and paramilitaries,²³⁶ along with

²³³ Francisco E. Thoumi, “Competitive Advantages in the Production and Trafficking of Coca-Cocaine and Opium-Heroin in Afghanistan and the Andean Countries,” in *Innocent Bystanders: Developing Countries and the War on Drugs*, eds. Philip Keefer and Norman Loayza (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan/World Bank, 2010), 207. Note: Thoumi makes the point that the Spanish did not have a concept of a strong central state to bequeath the Colombians, as Spain was undergoing a process of national unification when the *conquistadores* arrived (Thoumi, *Innocent Bystanders*, 207).

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, 206.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*

²³⁶ The two main leftist rebel groups are the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (FARC), and the smaller *Ejército de Liberación Nacional* (ELN). The main rightwing paramilitary group operating in Colombia was the *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* (AUC), or the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia, officially demobilized during the periods of 2004 and 2006 (See: Jeremy McDermott, “Colombia Militaries

populations of desperately impoverished peasants. With little in the way of infrastructure or alternatives, the peasants have often grown and harvested coca leaves in order to survive.

In recent years, a dearth of jobs and economic opportunity, peppered with a sense of animosity toward the state and antipathy toward the upper classes, has also driven large numbers of Colombian youth from the urban slums to the outskirts to process *pasta básica* or *pasta base* in toxic makeshift “laboratories.”²³⁷

A pervasively weak sense of national identity and low social cohesion naturally produces low levels of social capital in Colombia. More than one researcher has concluded that this results in a lack of “solidarity, reciprocity, and trust” in Colombian society, and that, “The ‘bridging’ social capital that links groups to one another has been scarce.”²³⁸ It is proposed that the epidemic levels of crime, violence, and bloody civil strife that have historically been experienced in Colombia can be partially explained by an unusual lack of social capital in the country.

Disband,” *BBC News*, August 1, 2005. Accessed 11-1-14, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/4736803.stm>).

There is evidence that many AUC rearmed and regrouped to pursue various nefarious objectives, including to livelihoods in the drug trade. For example, the *Águilas Negras* (Black Eagles) are a group of new and former paramilitary, some of whom are believed to function as intermediaries between Colombian guerillas and international drug cartels. (See: “Aguilas Negras,” *InSight Crime*. Accessed 11-1-14, <http://www.insightcrime.org/colombia-organized-crime-news/aguilas-negras>).

²³⁷ Note: *Pasta base* is the crude solvent-laden *cocaine sulfate* paste that is an intermediary step in the production of *cocaine hydrochloride*, or pure cocaine from raw coca leaves.

²³⁸ Thoumi, *Innocent Bystanders*, 205-206. Note: In addition to three of his own works, Thoumi cites works by five other authors that discuss the problematic aspects of inadequate social capital in Colombian society.

In a recent year, Colombia was alleged to have been a primary producer of counterfeit US and EU currency and counterfeit passports.²³⁹ The country is also one of the top suppliers of Latina prostitutes for the European market, and it is the country with the second highest rate of child soldiers.²⁴⁰ An estimated 5.7 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) as of December 2013 land Colombia at the top of the list in that category.²⁴¹ This number of IDPs amounts to well over 10 percent of the population, and it remains a terribly destabilizing force for the government and Colombian society as a whole. Colombia has also hosted the largest number of landmine victims in recent years, with an average of three casualties per day in 2005.²⁴² Violence, drugs, crime, chaos, kidnapping, murder, and assassination have all been synonymous with Colombia in the media in recent times.²⁴³

One could take sides in a “chicken-or-the-egg” type of argument concerning what started the downward Colombian spiral toward greater and greater criminality and

²³⁹ “‘Al-Qaeda Link’ to Colombia Ring,” *BBC News*, January 27, 2006. Accessed 10-27-14, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/4654162.stm>.

²⁴⁰ “Horrific Use of Child Soldiers Rising in Colombia, Report Finds,” *CNN/CNN Freedom Project*, October 15, 2012. Accessed 10-27-14, <http://thecnnfreedomproject.blogs.cnn.com/2012/10/15/horrific-use-of-child-soldiers-rising-in-colombia-report-finds/>.

²⁴¹ Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, *Colombia: Internal Displacement in Brief*, December 31, 2014. Accessed 10-27-14, <http://www.internal-displacement.org/americas/colombia/summary/>.

²⁴² Landmine and Cluster Munitions Monitor, *2006 Report*, “Colombia.” Accessed 10-21-14, http://www.the-monitor.org/index.php/publications/display?act=submit&pqs_year=2006&pqs_type=lm&pqs_report=colombia&pqs_section.

²⁴³ Note: Original reference to many of these unfortunate statistics concerning Colombia attributed to Francisco Thoumi, *Innocent Bystanders*, 206.

destabilization – the lack of social capital and weak national authority or the infestation of the drug trade -- but the results are irrefutable. They have fed and mutually reinforced each other in a continuously vicious cycle, and now one set of these problems cannot be significantly diminished without addressing the other.

Finally, it should be noted that a rigid class structure and exclusive land tenure system in Colombian society has not traditionally presented much opportunity for economic advancement for large populations of rural peasants or urban slum dwellers. Francisco Thoumi notes that, “Among the Latin American countries with large peasant populations, Colombia is the only one that has never had meaningful land reform.”²⁴⁴ This socioeconomic structure has apparently provided sufficiently low opportunity costs for scores of poor Colombians involved in some aspect of the illegal drug trade. Moreover, the limitations on upward economic mobility have fuelled regional and class animosity, and further delegitimized state authority.

The horrific civil conflict in Colombia during the 1940s and 1950s known as *La Violencia*, has been explained by some as a desperate war fought between would-be reformers and elite landowners who were desperate to resist any change in the land tenure system or the rigid socioeconomic order in Colombia. Waged largely in rural areas between supporters of the Liberal and the Conservative parties, *La Violencia* killed between 200,000 and 300,000 people in Colombia out of a population of 11 or 12 million, and spurred mass rural-urban migration to the teeming urban slums.²⁴⁵

²⁴⁴ Thoumi, *Innocent Bystanders*, 210.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 209.

The bittersweet end to *La Violencia* came with a power-sharing settlement between the Liberals and Conservatives, in which they agreed to periodically rotate occupation of the higher offices and split the distribution of jobs between the two. In divvying up the spoils of public office in this way they were able to end the chronic bloodshed, but they left inherent societal inequality intact. The compromise also created a political arrangement that was disconnected and unresponsive to the masses, based on patronage and rife with corruption.²⁴⁶

It was from such a milieu that the traffickers from Medellín emerged to challenge traditional societal boundaries. Through the brazenness of their actions and their conspicuous display of wealth, they became a heroic inspiration to the thousands of youths rotting in the city's shantytowns who aspired to something better. Drug lord donations to the poor and the sponsoring of community services further endeared them to the region's lower classes, garnering them a Robin Hood-like legitimacy and level of allegiance that the state had not earned. Likewise, Pablo Escobar was beloved for the soccer fields that he famously had built for the people in poor neighborhoods, and for distributing cash and groceries to those in need.²⁴⁷

Even more influential than narco largess, the cocaine trade brought scores of new jobs to the unemployed masses of Medellín's slums. Native Mary Roldán remembers, "Petty thievery declined...as the unemployed youth of the city's surrounding slums found more

²⁴⁶ Thoumi, *Innocent Bystanders*, 209.

²⁴⁷ Mary Roldán, "Colombia: Cocaine and the 'Miracle' of Modernity in Medellín," in *Cocaine: Global Histories*, ed. Paul Gootenberg (New York, NY: Routledge, 1999), 175.

lucrative work in the emergent drug syndicate – as messengers, bodyguards, *mulas* (human transporters of the drug), assassins, enforcers, gun runners, and distributors.”²⁴⁸ This dynamic highlighted deficiencies in government economic and socioeconomic programs, and created popular legitimacy and allegiance for the drug traffickers.²⁴⁹

Also, like soldiers in an ongoing civil conflict, a booming drug industry tends to create large numbers of people with specialized skills that are difficult to translate to legal enterprise. Consequently, once illegal drug production takes root in a society and more and more people acquire skills and livelihoods dependent on the industry, it becomes very difficult to permanently suppress. Even if illicit crop cultivation can be reduced and drug production disrupted, the know-how and parts of the trafficking network often remain intact for long periods of time and are more or less accessible for reactivation when the heat blows over.

This is why it is so important to accompany eradication campaigns with programs that address primary drivers of illicit crop and drug production, like poverty, unemployment,

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 168-169.

²⁴⁹ These particular phenomena and dynamics surrounding the drug trade have been repeatedly found in many drug-producing and drug trafficking areas of the world. For another example, many of the northern state regions of Mexico have not traditionally benefitted from good state services provision or plentiful employment opportunities. In recent years, this situation has presented narcotraffickers with a ready pool of disaffected young men who are desperate to make money. It has also created an environment where, in addition to providing jobs, narco donations to impoverished areas or improvements to infrastructure have won them the loyal “hearts and minds” of the people, who widely celebrate them in *narcocorridos* and other forms of *narcocultura*. (For a history of Mexican glorification of the underdog smuggler dating back to the 19th Century and the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, see Dirk W. Raat and Michael M. Brescia, *Mexico and the United States: Ambivalent Vistas, Fourth Edition*, University of Georgia Press, 2010. For a glimpse of the intense popularity modern *narcocorridos* among Mexican youth, see “Al Otro Lado (to the other side),” directed by Natalia Almada, Altamura Films, 2005.)

displacement and access to land. If some of these causes of drug production can be mitigated and opportunity costs for growing coca and processing *coca básica* can be significantly raised for large numbers of people involved, then perhaps reductions from vigorous eradication and interdiction operations can be sustained. But without significant AD and good governance, eradication and interdiction do nothing to change the long-term cost/benefit calculus for the poor and desperate people who work in the drug trade. These are the same prerequisites and contingencies for improvement in drug supply control that were evident in Thailand and Laos, repeated here thousands of miles away in Colombia.

As the drug lords became ever more rich and powerful, they purchased large country estates and rural acreage. In turn, as their real estate holdings expanded to the hinterlands, they increasingly came into conflict with greater numbers of peasants and migrants who were squatting on the land. To rectify this situation, the drug lords hired their own gunmen and formed paramilitary armies to evict peasants and patrol their territories, which sometimes covered areas slated for land reform. Thoumi identifies this process as a “violent land counterreform.”²⁵⁰

In short order, these troops came up against leftist militias (FARC and ELN) who had also staked their claims in the outback. As a result, the hired guns for the drug lords and other landed elite evolved into major military forces (AUC), and the escalated result has helped sustain yet another long and disastrous period of civil war and violence for the

²⁵⁰ Francisco Thoumi, *Political Economy and Illegal Drugs in Colombia* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1994), 239.

nation. Originally the self-appointed purview of the rebel guerillas, brokering and taxing coca harvests and the cocaine trade gradually became the main source of revenue for both left and rightwing military organizations in Colombia, fueling even more violent competition between the groups.²⁵¹

The new technologies that the drug lord capitalists implemented in the rural areas under their control increased efficiency and put more and more rural laborers out of work, making matters worse. LaMond Tullis describes the ultimate effect as:

...exacerbating regional violence as people struggle with each other over their “rights” and guerillas and drug-industry paramilitaries jockey for position. From one moment to the next, rural peasants, caught in the middle of the struggle, do not know from whom to buy protection. As a result, industry groups can create a climate of fear from which they are able, quite handily, to enact their own laws.²⁵²

The author goes on to say that as coca cultivation rapidly spread through rural Colombia, it destabilized and reconfigured social and political structures in the region. The thriving coca trade brought waves of new migrants to outback areas that had weak and ambiguous property rights, and many of these newcomers were ready and willing to use violence to stake their claim.

These were lawless and volatile areas, sporadically subject to violent contest. In this power vacuum, leftist guerilla units would sometimes be welcomed as an authority that

²⁵¹ UN Regional Information Centre for Western Europe, “The Guerilla Groups in Colombia.” Accessed 10-27-14, <http://www.unric.org/en/colombia/27013-the-guerrilla-groups-in-colombia>.

²⁵² Tullis, 149.

provided some order and stability in the area. At other times the guerillas would be cursed as dangerous bullies and parasites. Overall, increased bloodshed, alcohol abuse, and prostitution in the backcountry regions continued to weaken the state's ability to govern.²⁵³

Speaking of the problems surrounding weak property rights, Tullis concludes that:

This is a problem to which the state has not responded adequately, in part because of its historical attachment to regimes of wealth and property inequality. The government's inability to respond with timely cadastral surveys and land-registration systems has contributed to the sense of governmental illegitimacy, leaving the door open for guerillas and traffickers to settle disputes on their own terms. This lack of order further weakens the state and compromises the government.²⁵⁴

It was in this environment of roiling chaos that "Plan Colombia" was midwived.

Plan Colombia

During the heyday of the Colombian cartels from Medellín and Cali, the vast majority of Andean coca came from Peru and Bolivia and was imported into Colombia for processing and export as cocaine. But aggressive US-backed eradication and interdiction in Peru and Bolivia in the late 1980s and 1990s incentivized increased coca cultivation in

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ Tullis, 151-152.

Colombia.²⁵⁵ In addition, domestic cultivation was probably better suited to the smaller less sophisticated *cartelitos*, or *bandas criminales emergentes* (BACRIM), that began to pop up and have proliferated widely in Colombia since the dismantling of the majors from Medellín and Cali.²⁵⁶ By 2000, an estimated 90 percent of Andean coca was grown and harvested in Colombia.²⁵⁷

Plan Colombia was originally conceived in 1999 by the government of President Andrés Pastrana Arango as a comprehensive six-year program to improve national security and promote social and economic development in Colombia.²⁵⁸ It appears that over the course of conferring with US government officials about foreign aid for the initiative, that Plan Colombia was gradually transformed into a highly militarized high-dollar war on drugs. Altogether, the US government spent in excess of \$8 billion in support of Plan Colombia and associated programs from 2000 to 2011.²⁵⁹

During those years and up to the present there has been a vigorous campaign of forced eradication, both manual eradication (pulling up plants by hand) and aerial spraying of

²⁵⁵ Michelle L. Dion and Catherine Russler, “Eradication Efforts, the State, Displacement and poverty: Explaining Coca Cultivation in Colombia during Plan Colombia,” *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 2008, Vol. 40 (3): 400. See also, Bagley, “The Evolution of Drug Trafficking and Organized Crime in Latin America,” 102-103.

²⁵⁶ Thoumi, *Innocent Bystanders*, 237-238.

²⁵⁷ Bagley, 102.

²⁵⁸ Congressional Research Service, “International Drug Control Policy: Background and U.S. Responses, CRS Report for Congress.”

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

toxic herbicides.²⁶⁰ The violence and alleged human rights violations that have often occurred surrounding militarized ground operations,²⁶¹ as well as the toxic contamination of people, farmland, and food crops from aerial spraying have made Plan Colombia hugely controversial over the years. Moreover, it is questionable that aerial spraying of herbicide has been an effective means of eradication, or that it has been a primary catalyst for dramatic reductions in coca cultivation in Colombia despite 1.6 million hectares sprayed from 1996 to 2012.²⁶²

In any case, sustaining the otherwise meaningless short-term gains from drastic eradication measures requires comprehensive alternative development programs. Fortunately, the Colombian government has put much more effort and resources into AD alongside their eradication activities in most recent times.

²⁶⁰ Aerial eradication in Plan Colombia operations primarily used the herbicide Roundup Ultra, manufacture by the Monsanto Corporation. As previously mentioned, Monsanto is also the producer of Paraquat that caused a panic in the US in the seventies, warranted or not. Interestingly, they were also one of the main manufacturers of Agent Orange in the 1960s for the US government herbicidal warfare program. The other major manufacturer of Agent Orange for the US government was Dow Chemical Company, which also produced napalm B for the American armed forces in the late sixties.

As in Afghanistan, the US government contracted the private security firm DynCorp International to perform many of the anti-narcotics tasks in Colombia, beginning in 1997. This includes the aerial spraying of coca crops. Formerly the director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy and United States “Drug Czar,” General Barry McCaffrey has served on the board of directors at DynCorp in recent years (Chouvy, *Opium*, 115).

²⁶¹ Adam Isacson, “Time to Abandon Coca Fumigation in Colombia,” Washington Office on Latin America, October 7, 2013. Accessed 11-12-14, http://www.wola.org/commentary/time_to_abandon_coca_fumigation_in_colombia. Note: Article states that Colombian government decision to rely so heavily on aerial spraying, unlike Peru or Bolivia, is because of the mortal danger to those conducting coca eradication efforts on the ground in the outback of Colombia. Since 2009, 62 eradicators have been killed and 387 wounded from guerilla landmines, IEDs, or sniper attacks.

²⁶² Ibid.

For many years, up to 75 percent of US aid for Plan Colombia was allocated to the police and military and much less for AD and social welfare for the rural populations in those areas that were consistently sprayed with herbicide.²⁶³ Regardless of these shortcomings, it appears that the money spent to bolster law enforcement in the country has helped to support substantial reductions in crime, kidnappings, and homicides.²⁶⁴

Most recently, many of the actions taken by the Colombian government during the period of improved security and a dozen years of consistent reductions in coca cultivation have been very progressive, following eradication with intensive AD initiatives. In fact, some of the extensive AD architecture and social programs that they have instituted during this time have surely contributed to a diminished coca industry in the country as well as reductions in crime tangentially associated with drug trafficking. Similarly, the relative calm that has come with increased law and order has allowed the government some breathing room to advance peace talks with leftist rebels. In turn, an enduring end to widespread civil conflict is essential to maintaining increased stability and sustaining lower levels of coca production in Colombia.²⁶⁵

From 2003 to 2013, alternative development programs initiated by the Colombian government are reported to have reached 7,734 areas within 361 municipalities in the

²⁶³ Note: While massive spraying definitely killed a lot of coca, it may have triggered a subnational cockroach effect, displacing large numbers of people to other areas of the country, carrying with them coca cultivation and drug trade know-how (Dion and Russler, 403-404).

²⁶⁴ Congressional Research Service, “International Drug Control Policy: Background and U.S. Responses, CRS Report for Congress,” 18.

²⁶⁵ Dion and Russler, 403.

country, “benefitting more than 156,000 families that were linked to illicit crops or were at risk of cultivating them.”²⁶⁶ These programs have involved everything from technical assistance with the production of alternative goods such as coffee and cacao, to the development of domestic and international marketing and commercial networks. There have also been offerings of cash incentives to abstain from illicit cultivation.²⁶⁷

One of the main alternative development programs instituted by the Colombian government is the Productive Projects Program (PPP). This program has allegedly benefitted tens of thousands of families through 644 alternative livelihood projects by 613 producer organizations, and affected upwards of 60,000 families during 2012 and 2013, with substantial investments from Colombian producer organizations.²⁶⁸ In addition, over half of these organizations are purported to be marketing their products, with credit and assets topping 21 billion pesos.²⁶⁹

Aside from enabling greater government control and increased stability in these regions, eradication combined with extensive AD seems to be paying off with steadily

²⁶⁶ UN Office of Drugs and Crime, *Colombia: Coca Cultivation Survey 2013*, June 2014, 78. Accessed 10-29-14, http://www.unodc.org/documents/crop-monitoring/Colombia/Colombia_coca_cultivation_survey_2013.pdf.

²⁶⁷ Note: The cash incentives offered through the Forest Ranger Family Program (PFGB) have been controversial, like similar incentives that have been offered in Southeast Asia and elsewhere. There is always an inherent risk that some farmers will officially tear out their illicit plantings and collect their incentives while replanting in some remote location.

²⁶⁸ UN Office of Drugs and Crime, *Colombia: Coca Cultivation Survey 2013*, 82.

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

reduced coca cultivation that has been sustained for more than a decade, from over 140,000 hectares in 2001 to just over 40,000 hectares in 2013.²⁷⁰ The UNODC reports:

During the last decade, Colombia has created an institutional framework, playing a leading role in the implementation of alternative development politics as an effective strategy for the reduction of illicit crop cultivation. This institutional framework is not only reflected in the formulation and application of public politics but also in the strengthening of organizational capacities to promote alternative development with a social, entrepreneurial and business vision.²⁷¹

The report also concludes that:

Alternative development in Colombia has contributed to a sustainable reduction in illicit crops, by implementing sustainable options to replace income from illicit economies. As a consequence, the state has been able to act within vulnerable areas, with a low level of connectivity and problems with violence, improving the quality of life for communities within various regions of the country. This has strengthened the rural economy in vulnerable areas....²⁷²

These statements appear to be accurate and these developments are very encouraging. As AD programs progress they can catalyze and empower a virtuous cycle of positive effects for the whole of society that continuously mediate deleterious societal phenomena, including some of the main causes of illicit crop cultivation and drug production. AD projects that create better roads and infrastructure to facilitate the commercial viability of alternative crops for rural smallholders also enable a greater state

²⁷⁰ Ibid., 17.

²⁷¹ Ibid., 84.

²⁷² Ibid.

capacity for control of remote areas and the promotion of law and order. In addition, if rural areas are given access to commercial markets, as well as access to education, health, and other state services, their opportunity costs for joining or assisting insurgent troops and drug traffickers steadily increase. This is an important opportunity for the Colombian government to build some sorely needed trust and legitimacy among the rural peasantry.

There have also been historic advances in ongoing peace talks with the FARC and the ELN, including agreements on land reform²⁷³ and limiting drug production in areas under their respective control.²⁷⁴ These talks follow the negotiations with the AUC roughly a decade earlier, and the somewhat successful demobilization of those forces from 2004-2006.

These developments bode well for Colombian drug supply control, but continued success lies down a long and rocky road. In order to sustain illicit crop reductions and keep cocaine production at a minimum, the government must be very successful at brokering a peace in the country that will end endemic civil conflict and clear the way for them to effectively assert the authority of law and order throughout Colombian territory.

This is a tall order in every respect. No doubt, there are many entities on all sides that are profiting handsomely from the Colombian cocaine trade. These are criminals that can only flourish in chaotic areas free from lawful government control, and so may scheme to

²⁷³ “Colombia and FARC Rebels Reach Agreement on Land Reform,” *BBC News*, May 27, 2013. Accessed 10-23-14, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-22676049>.

²⁷⁴ Transnational Institute, “Drugs on the Agenda of Colombian Peace Talks,” *Drugs and Democracy*. Accessed 10-23-14, <http://www.tni.org/article/drugs-agenda-colombian-peace-talks>.

monkey wrench any peace deal. In the end, it is a daunting fact that the entirety of Colombian territory has never been under effective state control.²⁷⁵

In summary, time will tell if the state has made progress sufficient to maintain illicit crop reductions and limited drug production in Colombia when new destabilizing shocks occur in the future. In the event of pressure from growing consumer demand in new markets for cocaine, a balloon effect from expanded eradication operations in Peru, or a failure of the peace talks and resumed conflict in remote areas of the country, adequate consolidation of substantial gains made through alternative development programs would be crucial to enduring Colombian success in stemming coca cultivation.

²⁷⁵ Thoumi, *Innocent Bystanders*, 207. Note: Thoumi explains that while the same may be said for some other countries in Latin America, what makes Colombia different is that these uncontrolled areas are not simply sparsely populated areas of hinterlands, but include small urban centers with significant numbers of the citizenry (Thoumi, *Innocent Bystanders*, 245).

Chapter 4. Conclusion

*“That humanity at large will ever be able to dispense with Artificial Paradises seems very unlikely. Most men and women lead lives at the worst so painful, at the best so monotonous, poor and limited that the urge to escape, the longing to transcend themselves if only for a few moments, is and has always been one of the principal appetites of the soul.”*²⁷⁶

Aldous Huxley

Penned by Huxley in 1954, the above passage rings true when considering the wealth of evidence confirming the use of some kind of mind-altering “Artificial Paradise” in virtually all societies, from antiquity to the contemporary era. This common yearning of humanity to transcend or escape the drudgery of one’s daily existence, combined with the extremely addictive quality of modern chemical synthetics and derivatives, and the highly efficient systems of trade in the contemporary global marketplace, has created the gargantuan multi-billion dollar global drug industry that we have today.

Attempting to rein in the beast, the UN and the US took the lead and have dominated and driven global anti-drug policy since World War II. All of the subsequent international treaties, conventions, policies and diplomatic initiatives promoted by these two entities since that time can be characterized as firmly rooted in the prohibition of designated dangerous drugs, including opium and cocaine. In order to limit the availability of these banned substances on the black market, policies, programs, and

²⁷⁶ Aldous Huxley, *The Doors of Perception/Heaven and Hell* (New York, NY: Harper Colophon/Harper & Row Publishers, 1963), 62.

diplomatic pressure have focused squarely on the “supply side,” or limiting the supply of illegal drugs emanating from source countries.

As detailed in the foregoing research, over the last several decades supply side strategies for control of heroin and cocaine have predominantly focused on the forced eradication of illicit crops. Alternative development programs hold much promise for the mitigation of some of the primary drivers of illicit crop cultivation, but have really scarcely been given much of a chance in most drug-producing regions.²⁷⁷

Thailand is a rare case where alternative development was patiently and consistently funded at adequate levels over a number of years, with strong political and popular support. The programs that helped the highland tribes in Thailand to develop viable alternative livelihoods were buttressed by comprehensive large-scale rural development initiatives that made essential improvements in rural infrastructure, health, and education. These initiatives enabled the highlanders to connect with the mainstream of Thai society for the very first time. The result has been an insignificant level of poppy cultivation and opium production in Thailand for nearly twenty years.²⁷⁸

The Thai case demonstrates the effectiveness of comprehensive AD programs to better the lives of poor farmers and give them viable alternatives to growing illegal drug crops in order to support themselves. This has resulted in the enfranchisement of highland tribal families and a crucial alteration of the cost/benefit analysis when considering the farming of illicit crops. It is essential that this calculus be reconfigured in the rural areas of countries that produce illicit crops, and the only way to raise the poor farmers’

²⁷⁷ Chouvy, *Opium*, 187.

²⁷⁸ UN Office of Drugs and Crime, *Southeast Asia Opium Survey 2013: Lao PDR, Myanmar*.

opportunity costs for illicit cultivation, is through comprehensive AD and rural development.

In contrast to Thailand, the Laotians have never benefitted from consistently adequate funding for AD, meaningful rural development in drug-producing areas, or strong political leadership promoting that course of action. Hamstrung by false promises of foreign financial assistance and misguided domestic policies, the Laotian government now appears focused on making money through the kind of massive industrial development of natural resources that will not create significant domestic employment opportunities, but is displacing growing numbers of rural peasants and exacerbating insecurity and other causes of illicit crop cultivation.

Granted, Laos suffered a horrific and prolonged period of violent conflict during the Indochina Wars, and has not benefitted from many years of strong economic growth like Thailand. But if Laos has any chance of stemming the current rises in opium production, it must find a way to mitigate the drivers of that production. Alternative development programs can provide those essential tools, as demonstrated in the case of Thailand.

But Thailand is unique in the field as the prevailing ideal of alternative development and sustained illicit crop reductions. Unfortunately, the case of Laos is much more common. It is only one of many countries that have ultimately failed to prevent resumptions of drug crop cultivation following latent periods of drug production.

Can Colombia overcome its chaotic tendencies and the many pitfalls to join Thailand in extending its current reductions of illicit cultivation over a period of many years? If Colombia has any chance of joining Thailand in the winner's circle, it must work hard and fast to make big gains in alternative development.

The situation is fraught with contingencies on all sides. Chaos in the countryside from renewed civil conflict or large increases in consumer demand for cocaine from Asia or Africa would test Colombia's endurance in this realm. But peace, law and order, and viably attractive alternatives to producing drug crops are the only things that may keep coca harvests in Colombia at currently low levels. All of these desirable outcomes can either be achieved directly, or substantially reinforced by government social programs and alternative development projects.

There is another factor that serves to maintain the poverty, insecurity, and food scarcity that regularly underlies illegal crop cultivation: an absence of secure property rights. Throughout the research presented here we see that in the countries with problematic levels of illegal crops, time and again, the rural peasantry has no secure title to the land and so is at the mercy of any number of predatory entities and actions. Instability and competition with guerillas, AUC forces, drug lord land developers, and other desperate squatters keeps large numbers of rural farmers tenuously clinging to temporary small plots of land in Colombia, where about 60 percent of coca farmers do not possess a land deed.²⁷⁹ Similarly, the hill tribes in Laos have been jettisoned about by armed conflict, forced relocation projects, and now government enforced industrial encroachment.

²⁷⁹ "Colombia to Offer Land Titles to Coca Growers Who Go Legal," *InSight Crime*. Accessed 11-10-14, <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-briefs/colombia-to-offer-land-titles-to-coca-growers-who-go-legal>.

Throughout the literature cited in my research, food scarcity and food insecurity is consistently mentioned as commonly contributing to illicit crop production, but land titles and property rights are discussed far less frequently.²⁸⁰

The consequences that accrue from the absence of legally guaranteed and enforced property rights in these countries, when combined with weak state maintenance of security and lack of infrastructure in remote areas, has often resulted in the rather sensible decision to cultivate the most remunerative cash crop as quickly as possible – coca in Colombia, and opium poppy in Laos. Indeed, in these countries the land holding is often too small or infertile to plant sufficient food crops to support one's family. Therefore, access that is limited to smallholdings or to less arable land on a tenuous or contentious basis contributes to food insecurity that influences a decision to grow and harvest saleable cash crops in order to buy food and other necessities.²⁸¹

In other words, a lack of secure access to decent agricultural landholdings helps keep rural peasants and ethnic groups in these countries in a state of food scarcity and food insecurity, as well as a state of general insecurity. Therefore, it can be stated that a lack of property rights and equitable systems of land tenure significantly contribute to some of the primary drivers of illicit crop production. Tracing the processes of illicit production in Laos and Colombia makes clear that without secure rights to decent landholdings, poor rural farmers in these countries are often relegated to the lowliest levels of the drug trade.

²⁸⁰ Tullis and Thoumi do mention the Colombian government's historic failure to implement land reform as a driver of the internal displacement and chaos, if not illicit crop cultivation, per se.

²⁸¹ For example, Dion and Russler point out that an estimated 60% of Colombian coca is grown on smallholdings of less than two hectares, indicating illicit cultivation as a survival strategy for those who have limited access to land (Dion and Russler, *Eradication Efforts, the State, Displacement and Poverty*, 408).

The natural corollary to this realization would be a policy recommendation for these countries to work hard to enact fair and just land reform and land registration systems, and to enshrine laws protecting private property. But in much of Latin America this would require at least a partial reconfiguration of the traditional elite power structure and longstanding wealth distribution systems, something that has historically been at the root of countless civil conflicts and wars throughout the region. Effective enactment and implementation of similar reform measures in Southeast Asian drug-producing countries would probably require routing significant chunks of corrupted and compromised sectors of the state, in order to dramatically reduce the deleterious effects of criminal greed and patronage in public affairs and the contracting of foreign investment.

As difficult as those undertakings may be, there are currently active land reform movements in Colombia²⁸² and elsewhere in Latin America, and support for anti-corruption regimes in many quarters around the world. To the extent that these campaigns are successful, they will buttress anti-drug policy and may help to reduce or sustain reductions in illicit cultivation in those nations that are impacted.

Despite the celebrated downturn in coca production in Colombia, there is evidence that recent progress may have been made due to an anomalous easing of market pressure. It appears that we are in an unusual period right now – more productive strains of coca and more efficient processing methods are apparently keeping world cocaine supply at

²⁸² “Territorial Consolidation in Colombia: The Right to Have Territory and a Territory with Rights,” *Diálogo*. Accessed 11-10-14, http://dialogo-americas.com/en_GB/articles/rmisa/features/regional_news/2014/01/06/consolidacion-territorial.

fairly stable levels, thus making up for coca shortfalls due to eradication and other factors.²⁸³ What's more, cocaine use has slacked off somewhat in the US and Europe in recent years, and while use is growing in other parts of the world, it has yet to dramatically surge. So for the time being, substantial reductions in illicit cultivation are not yet triggering a balloon effect, kick-starting coca cultivation in dormant regions. Peru even managed to cut coca output by 17.5 percent last year.²⁸⁴

But as coca cultivation in South America continues to shrink and the markets for cocaine in Asia, Africa, and parts of Latin America continue to grow, there will soon come a day of reckoning. History has repeatedly demonstrated that farm gate prices go up when market demand for cocaine or heroin reaches a point that outstrips the capacity of existing drug production operations. In turn, these pay raises have always incentivized poor rural farmers somewhere to grow coca or opium poppy and cash in. When new consumer demand for cocaine reaches that point in the future, perhaps Colombia will have acquired the capacity sustain the pressure from increased drug demand like Thailand has. Perhaps at that time Colombia's Andean neighbors will have made fewer inroads

²⁸³ UN Office of Drugs and Crime, *World Drug Report 2013*. Accessed 11-10-14, http://www.unodc.org/unodc/secured/wdr/wdr2013/World_Drug_Report_2013.pdf. The report states that, due to increased "efficiency in the manufacturing chain from coca bush to cocaine hydrochloride...while the estimated total area under cultivation in 2011 stood at three quarters of the level in 1990, the quantity of cocaine manufactured in 2011 was at least as high as the level in 1990..." (Pp. 37-38).

²⁸⁴ Robert Kozak, "Peru Cut Coca Plantings by 17.5% Last Year," *Wall Street Journal*, June 11, 2014. Accessed 11-10-14, <http://online.wsj.com/articles/peru-cut-coca-plantings-by-17-5-last-year-1402517753>.

remedying the poverty and insecurity that drive illicit cultivation, and will therefore be dragged into resurgent drug crop production to meet global demand while Colombia resists the pressure and stands firm. Time will tell.

It is true that Peru has made some reductions in coca cultivation during this relatively relaxed period of drug market transition. But the Shining Path guerilla group has been resurgent in the primitive coca-producing areas of the VRAE for the last several years, and they have allegedly redoubled their involvement in cultivation and smuggling of coca.²⁸⁵

The extent to which the respective guerilla groups and militias in Colombia and Peru are actively destabilizing the countryside and engaging in the drug trade will help determine the path of least resistance for entrepreneurial drug traffickers when new markets for cocaine reach the point of critical mass. When that time comes, the region that hosts a kind of enforced lawlessness, with the least amount of state interference or control, will likely be saddled with the majority of the new coca fields that must be planted and new jungle labs that must be established in order to meet new market demand.

This scenario leads to a final set of questions: Is it wise to hasten renewed market demand with a single-minded pursuit of lower and lower coca yields through eradication? Is it ever possible to escape the market mechanisms that appear to have sustained global

²⁸⁵ “Peru’s Security Forces Kill Three Shining Path Rebels,” *BBC News*, August 12, 2013. Accessed 11-11-14, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-23665778>. For an informal first-hand account, see Fernando Lucena, “The Last Ever Interview with the Leaders of Peru’s Shining Path Guerilla Army,” *Vice*, October 30, 2013. Accessed 11-11-14, http://www.vice.com/en_uk/read/the-last-ever-interview-with-the-leaders-of-the-shining-path.

supplies of cocaine and heroin at stable or periodically elevated levels for decades?²⁸⁶ Would it be better to shift the main focus of anti-drug operations to harm reduction in drug-producing regions while working to slowly limit production through alternative development, rather than suddenly destroying the crops and livelihoods of scores of people, creating instability and potentially dispersing drug crop cultivators, processors, traffickers, and other criminal operatives into regions and countries that may be thoroughly unprepared, and have fragile institutions that are less resilient?

These are worthy questions that were raised during the course of my research, yet an in-depth exploration of them stood outside the scope of this paper as defined by my initial research question. However, they are nonetheless very important questions to ponder in the context of reevaluating what might make for more humane and effective drug supply control policy. In fact, answering these questions may very well be more important to achieving that goal than is the answer to my research question.

I believe that this may be true because, as I continued to work on this thesis project over the last year, I gradually came to realize that the question of what most influences success or failure in illicit crop reduction and drug supply control efforts is premised on the implicit presupposition that current anti-drug policy and anti-drug operations, when “successful,” are effective in limiting drug production, drug trafficking, and drug use. While lasting reductions of illicit cultivation over the course of many years have been achieved within the current prohibitionist regime, the reality is that it is much more

²⁸⁶ I am referring to substantially elevated levels of drug production that sometimes occur to meet significant levels of new consumer demand, such as the recent production spikes in Southeast Asian opium production to meet new Chinese heroin demand. This phenomenon is driving up annual global supply levels. It is always fundamentally an equation involving supply and demand.

common that the simple violent and sporadic forced eradication of drug crops is roundly touted by foreign sponsors, domestic governments and militaries, and intergovernmental organizations as “successful” drug control. Through the foregoing examination of the subject, I believe that I have demonstrated that this is often not the case.

There has been a relentless drive for numbers in the drug wars of the last few decades that is very apparent in the literature. The annual UNODC World Drug Reports are primarily filled with charts and statistics comparing illicit crop cultivation and drug production numbers – hectares, tons, and kilograms – from region to region, country to country, market to market, year to year. Many pages are then devoted to analysis and theories behind the trends and disparities in the totals. Increased levels are lamented and explained. Reduced levels are explained and celebrated, nearly always with rosy projections for even bigger reductions coming from the particular country’s government. The organization and composition of the data and tone of the narration often seem to convey the idea that, like points on the scoreboard at a football game, that’s all there is to winning -- that winning the war on drugs can be achieved (or at least accurately measured) by continuing to destroy more and more hectareage of illicit drug crops. Once again, the research that I have presented here has shown that a winning drug control strategy must be far more sophisticated and thoughtful than that.

Even now, with a greater focus on alternative development within illicit crop reduction programs and a general acknowledgement of the essential importance of AD in altering root causes of drug crop production, many official entities continue to exhibit an

ideologically disconnected drive and enthusiasm for continued forced eradication.²⁸⁷

Despite the near-universal recognition of market forces and the balloon effect that keep global drug supply levels relatively stable, and a long record of unsustainable illicit crop suppression in the absence of developmental safety nets for rural farmers, the promotion of forced eradication continues. That is to say, forced eradication is still conducted, rewarded, and officially celebrated regardless of whether or not viable alternatives exist for rural farmers.

Perhaps this fixation on eradication is partly the legacy of the no-nonsense, law-and-order mentality of the drug war and US drug warriors. It is surely perpetuated by posturing foreign officials who are eager to please the US government and get certified for successive allotments of money and military hardware. But a narrow focus on statistics and the promotion of eradication target numbers is probably also perpetuated by droves of bureaucrats, from the White House to the ONDCP to the DEA to the UNODC, motivated to show their superiors and others that they have achieved some progress in fighting the illegal drug trade. The self-perpetuating endurance of bureaucracies and bureaucratic processes is well known, and once established, these institutions can develop a momentum and internal resilience regardless of whether or not their organization or policies are effective or counterproductive.

²⁸⁷ To be clear, the UNODC has promoted AD as an important part of drug supply control in producer-countries for many years and regularly releases publications and updated profiles of AD programs in various countries. But there is an almost schizophrenic rift between the majority of UNODC publications that deal with forced eradication and tracking production levels, and their press that promotes AD.

In closing, it seems logical that the destruction of known coca or opium poppy fields would contribute positively to drug control and be a good thing. This has been the underlying premise of prohibitionist drug control policy for many decades. However, though it is counterintuitive, the truth is that the eradication of drug crops without thoughtful and thorough AD as a prerequisite is a costly mistake that generally achieves no lasting reductions and often counterproductively inflames the very situations that promote illegal drug cropping in the first place.

Through tracing the processes of drug production and drug control initiatives in Thailand, Laos, and Colombia, I have demonstrated the basic circumstantial similarity among the three nations regarding endemic factors conducive to illicit crop cultivation and illegal drug production, and established an ideal type of drug-producing region. The common variables include insurgency and armed conflict, remote and undeveloped territory under limited state control, and populations of impoverished subsistence farmers who live with food scarcity or food insecurity and have few viable legal alternatives to illicit cultivation.

In the course of my research, I also found that a lack of secure and state-enforced property rights guaranteeing access to sufficient areas of arable land for adequate and steady cultivation of foodstuffs contributed significantly to the incidence of illicit cultivation in the three cases presented here. Although property rights are occasionally referred to in the literature and obviously contribute to food insecurity, their absence is not consistently identified as a common contributor to illicit crop cultivation. I believe that my research validates the importance of specifically stressing the absence of property rights as a common causal determinant of illegal crop production.

By tracing the processes of drug crop cultivation and drug control initiatives in Thailand, Laos, and Colombia, and comparatively analyzing those processes and results, I have demonstrated the potential effectiveness of alternative development programs to address and rectify the underlying causes of illicit crop cultivation. In other words, by showing how alternative development can work to ameliorate the primary drivers of illicit crop cultivation, I have identified it as the factor that most influences success or failure in illicit crop reduction and drug supply control efforts, thus answering my initial research question.

By contrast, I have shown that forced eradication, without structural changes achieved through some form of AD initiatives, is likely to achieve only temporary reductions in drug crop levels and spread pain and suffering that may actually increase the levels of illegal production in the future. Despite ample documentation in support of these findings, the forced eradication of illicit crops continues to be undertaken in regions with rural populations that have not benefitted from any meaningful development or presentation of alternatives prior to the destruction of their crops.

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